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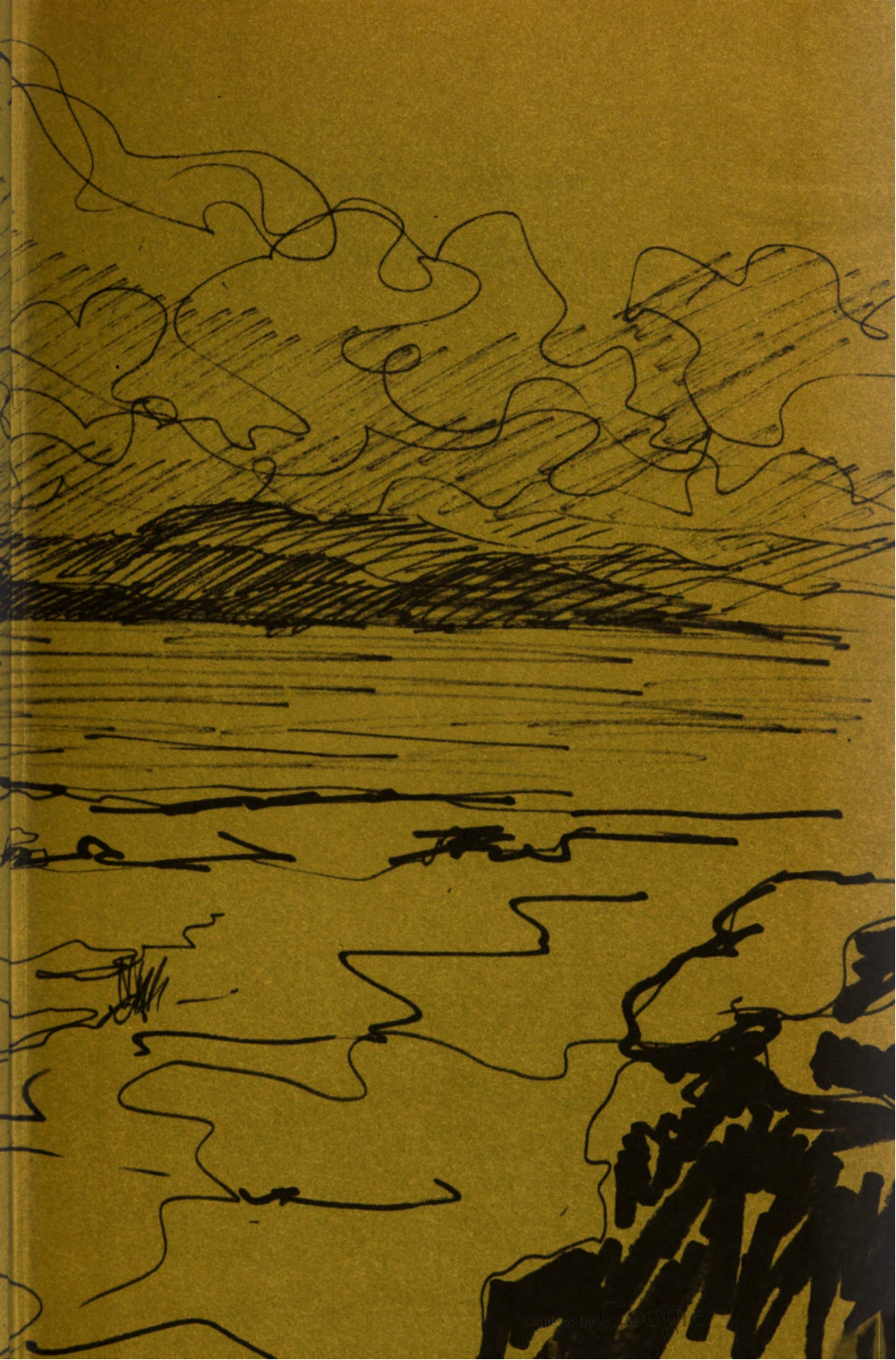
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BASUTOLAND

BASUTOLAND

BY
AUSTIN COATES

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1966

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FOREWORD

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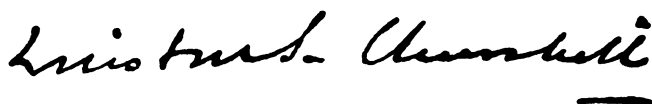
By the Rt. Hon. Sir Winston S. Churchill
K.G., O.M., C.H., M.P.

NOT since the days of the Roman Empire has a single nation carried so great a responsibility for the lives of men and women born outside her shores as Great Britain does today. Within her forty or so dependent territories dwell eighty million people for whose welfare and enlightenment Britain is, to a greater or lesser degree, answerable.

There has been no lack of critics, at home and abroad, to belittle Britain's colonial achievement and to impugn her motives. But the record confounds them. Look where you will, you will find that the British have ended wars, put a stop to savage customs, opened churches, schools and hospitals, built railways, roads and harbours, and developed the natural resources of the countries so as to mitigate the almost universal, desperate poverty. They have given freely in money and materials and in the services of a devoted band of Civil Servants; yet no tax is imposed upon any of the colonial peoples that is not spent by their own governments on projects for their own good.

I write 'their own governments' advisedly, for however much diverse conditions may necessitate different approaches, the British have for long had one goal in view for their overseas territories: their ultimate development into nations freely associated within the Commonwealth framework. The present state of the Commonwealth is the proof of the sincerity of this policy.

It is because I believe that Britain's colonial record is too little known and her policies too little understood that I welcome the books of the Corona Library. The aim of these books is to present a contemporary portrait, at once reliable and attractive, of each territory. I warmly commend the series to the attention of the public at home and abroad, for if these publications do even a little to clear away the clouds of misunderstanding and prejudice that have gathered round the very idea of colonial government, they will have been well worth while.



Chartwell, September 1956

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OLIVER CALDECOTT**

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The photographs on Plate XIV are reproduced by courtesy of the Transvaal and O.F.S. Chamber of Mines

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my most grateful thanks to all those who have aided me in the compilation of material for the writing of this book: to the officials of the Government of Basutoland who arranged my travels in the country, and who so generously gave of their time to answer my questions; to members of the Southern Africa and Information Departments of the Colonial Office, for their help and advice; to the Librarian and staff of the Colonial Office Library; and to the numerous persons, European and African, who in a private capacity gave me so much assistance and hospitality during a five-week stay in Basutoland, a visit which, thanks to them, was rendered unforgettable for me. I forbear to mention individual names of these new-found friends, but those among them to whom this book comes will recognize that these words are addressed to them, with my sincere thanks and good wishes.

A.C.

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Apart from the Annual Reports and Departmental Reports published by the Government of Basutoland, the following are the principal works consulted:

The Basuto by Hugh Ashton (Published for the International African Institute by the Oxford University Press, London, 1952)

Mes Souvenirs by Eugène Casalis (Société des Missions Evangéliques, Paris, 1884)

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History of the Basuto by D. Fred. Ellenberger and J. C. Macgregor (Caxton Publishing Co., London, 1912)

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Basutoland Medicine Murder by G. I. Jones. Cmd. 8209 (His Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1951)

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1. WHERE IT IS AND HOW TO GET THERE

BASUTOLAND is a small, rugged, mountainous country situated in the midst of the Republic of South Africa. It shares with the Republic of San Marino the distinction of being one of the only two countries in the world to be entirely enveloped by another country, to have no access to the exterior except through that country, and thus by that country's grace and favour. It also classes itself at once with such delightful places as Andorra, Monaco, and Liechtenstein, for whose separate existence there seems to be no appreciable reason except to provide inspiration for writers of operetta, and which by the very anomaly of their existence exercise considerable powers of attraction. All they need are a few good hotels and some tasteful postage stamps, and their future is assured.

On these two particular items Basutoland does well, and with its dusty, untarred roads, and the wild grandeur of its mountain scenery, it has, after the modern tenseness and efficiency of South Africa, that quality of other-worldness which is still to be found in the remoter parts of the highlands of Scotland, and on the human side something of the same pleasantly relaxed feeling which can be encountered in countries like Nepal, everlastingly engaged in a gentle struggle with decay whose ultimate conquest seems inevitable, yet which for mysterious reasons never quite gains the upper hand. This too is part of its picturesqueness, part of the inevitability of its appeal to the tourist who seeks something different.

Dominating the extreme south-eastern edge of the immense tableland of which the greater part of southern Africa from the Karoo to the Congo consists, Basutoland is a uniformly high country, its average ground altitude being nowhere less than 5,000 feet above sea level (areas at this altitude are laconically described as lowlands), its mountains culminating in Thabana Ntletyana, 11,425 feet, the highest peak in southern Africa. It has a high-altitude continental climate, with summers that are hot (35 °C. in the shade is not uncommon) without being oppressive,

BASUTOLAND

and cool dry winters with a marked difference between day and night temperatures (20 °C. at midday, minus 12 °C. at night). It is healthy and, specially in winter, invigorating. Most of the annual 28 inches of rain fall during the summer (October to April), during which occur, at times of excessive heat, the only natural phenomena to beware of: electric storms, and whirlwinds, whose development can however be seen, and path gauged, from considerable distances.

Occupying an area of 11,716 square miles, the country is about the size of Belgium, and more or less rectangular in shape, its longer frontiers north-west and south-east, its shorter north-east and south-west. On the east it is bordered by Natal, on the south by the Cape Province, and on the west and north by the Orange Free State, of which it is geographically a south-eastern extension.

The landscape of the Orange Free State typifies the nature of the southern African tableland as it is at these latitudes, which are well away from the tropics. Basically it is a high, dry, dusty area of sandstone rock and powdery soils, in which the only natural growth is sparse grass and various low forms of scrub. The earth's main nourishment is dew and the short showers of tropical intensity which fall in summer, but which sometimes fail to come.

The geological history of the area is a tale of millions of years of erosion by wind and water working on the soft powdery soil. The Free State is a land of immense semi-arid plains dotted with flat-topped mountains, many of which seem at first sight to be extinct volcanoes. It is more like the moon than the earth. For those who appreciate the vastness of distance, the linear austerity of treeless slopes, the reserved, graven splendour of earth in its many colours answering the varying rays of the sun, it is about the most solemn and magnificent sight in the world. But of course the mountains are not extinct volcanoes. Their flat tops record the original level of the tableland, the plains being the work of the millions of years of erosion, a process which, unless prevented by man in his own interests, will still go on in every field and farm amid the winds and showers of summer.

Everywhere the underlying problem of human livelihood is the regular provision of water. Rivers are few and small, and to bore a well it is a commonplace to have to go down a thousand feet. The summer rain comes with such violence that most of it

is wasted, and every winter there are long months of drought. Yet irrigate the earth and it is astonishingly fertile, the irrigated zones of the Free State standing out from the rest of the landscape in vivid splashes of green.

The western part of the Free State, and that part of the Cape Province which lies still further west of it, is a region of almost incredible emptiness and flatness. Traversing the territory from west to east, the number of flat-topped mountains gradually increases, until an area is reached where they distinctly dominate the landscape, seeming more important than the plains. It is the sign that one has reached Basutoland.

First, after crossing the frontier, come the lowlands. Broadly speaking, these lie all along the longer north-western border with the Free State, continuing inwards to an average depth of 30 miles, and amounting all told to about one-third of the country. Again broadly speaking, the character of the landscape continues much the same, but the problems of the land are aggravated. The mountains now begin to enfold one. There are still here and there the magnificent sweeps into the vastness that is Africa, but there are also moments of rugged intimacy. The plains are smaller and more hilly, and water is even more of a problem. It is in its nature an extension of the Orange Free State, but it is a land even more demanding and obdurate.

Further inward lies an even more inhospitable region, though one of great scenic splendour, the Maluti highlands. These, consisting of black basaltic rocks, rise as a great mountain massif in central and eastern Basutoland, occupying the remaining two-thirds of the country, and geographically constituting the roof of South Africa. Here life is mainly pastoral, little agriculture being possible. The Maluti mountains have an importance of their own, however. In their stark, intimidating valleys, themselves thousands of feet above the sea, lie the sources of the 30 or so rivers which by various courses unite to form the Orange River, which from Basutoland flows westward across the driest regions of the ill-watered tableland to debouch on the far side into the South Atlantic Ocean. The highlands of Basutoland, a region of innumerable and never-failing springs, and a land of deep winter snow, are in fact the natural reservoir for an otherwise near-waterless subcontinent.

At the eastern extremity of this great mountain massif Basuto-

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land ends. So too does the tableland of southern Africa. In the long line of the Drakensberg, formed as if a sculptor had carved it, the land sweeps dramatically down from heights of 11,000 feet and more to the fertile plains of Natal. From those heights, offering some of the most spectacular panoramic views on earth, one is in fact looking down from one world into another, from the tableland of harshness and drought, where even grass has to be tended with the greatest care, into a greener, warmer, more humid world, lulled by the mellow breezes of the Indian Ocean.

Viewed from without, therefore, Basutoland has different appearances depending on the quarter of the compass from which one looks. From Natal, on its eastern borders, it seems a high, remote, forbidding country, the trackless land beyond the Drakensberg. Along its southern borders with the Cape Province the clean sweep of the Drakensberg comes to an end, the land is generally mountainous on both sides of the frontier, communications are few, and the country still guards much of its remoteness. But coming round to its south-western and north-western frontiers with the Orange Free State, the sense of remoteness vanishes. Were it not for the police post, and for the fact that the excellent South African metalled highway disintegrates into a dirt track, one would not be conscious of having crossed a frontier – unless one was looking more at people than at landscape, when one would of course notice various things immediately.

Confining ourselves for the moment to landscape, Basutoland, it will be seen, faces the Orange Free State, has an elbow towards the Cape Province, and has its back to Natal.

For the tourist there are only two reasonable ways of reaching Basutoland: by car or by private aircraft. If arriving by private aircraft, it is important to remember to land first at the nearest airstrip on the South African side, to have papers checked and passports submitted for inspection. If making for Maseru, the capital of Basutoland, the appropriate South African airstrip is Ladybrand, in the Orange Free State, a flight of ten minutes or so from Maseru, which is only two miles inward from the frontier.

For those who have the misfortune not to maintain a private aircraft a road map of South Africa will provide the answers, the only point to be borne in mind being that the various frontier posts are open only from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., and some close even as

early as 4 p.m. A further point for those who intend doing any degree of travelling inside Basutoland is that the roads, though well built, are unsurfaced and much used. Thus in places they are genuine bone-shatterers, and a strongly built car with tyres in good condition is indicated, preferably with a good clearance.

To those very simple and innocent people – these include myself – who by dint of travelling in other continents have acquired faith in public transport, it should be explained that Africa, in its vastness and comparative emptiness, presents a disillusioning spectacle no matter how one approaches it. South Africans, in the generosity with which they welcome visitors, themselves militate against the development of public transport systems, being the first to utter expressions of dismay if a visitor announces his intention of arriving by train or taxi, let alone by bus, and being uncomplainingly prepared to motor hundreds of miles to avert such a disaster. So long as this state of generosity persists (and there is every indication that it will) the development of public transport, it can be appreciated, will remain in a state of pleasant suspense.

Thus, approaching Basutoland by ship, the nearest large seaport is Durban, 250 miles east of Maseru. By South African Railways it is in theory possible to proceed from Durban to Bethlehem, from Bethlehem to Marseilles, and from Marseilles on a short branch line to the Basutoland frontier, where. . . . But since if you know anyone in South Africa you will never be allowed to make this journey, it is perhaps simpler to say that, in practice, if coming by sea one is met at Durban by a friend with a car.

The nearest international airport is Johannesburg, 250 miles north of Maseru, and from Johannesburg there are numerous daily flights by the internal services of South African Airways to Bloemfontein, capital of the Orange Free State, from which it is a 93-mile journey eastwards by road to Maseru. The standard of the road may be judged from the fact that the 91 miles from Bloemfontein to the Basutoland frontier post can be done without hurrying in 90 minutes. For those intrepid travellers unalterably determined to get there by public transport there is a taxi service at Bloemfontein Air Terminal in town, but when selecting a driver it is advisable to choose one with a South African passport, and make sure he brings it, otherwise he will not be allowed

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across the frontier. Visitors will then find that Maseru is still two miles away, and that there is no taxi service.

It is furthermore advisable not to leave anything to last-minute telephone calls, since a call from South Africa to Basutoland entails inexplicable hours of delay usually ending with some kind of unanswerable statement, such as that they cannot accept a call till Tuesday, or that there is no such number. It is somewhat like telephoning Tibet; one wonders whether there is a telephone.

Having now, I hope, more or less explained where we are – with apologies to those who knew already – it is clearly time to revert to where we started, with Andorra, Monaco, Liechtenstein, and San Marino – to which we might add Luxembourg for good measure – and ask concerning Basutoland what one always asks about these others. How in the name of fortune did it get there in the first place?



2. PREHISTORIC BACKGROUND

THE answer to this question is an epic, in which the principal character is one of the greatest Africans of the nineteenth century, the Victorian chief Moshuésu (1786-1870), or as his name is more commonly spelt, Moshesh, the sound 'ué' in Sesotho being so soft that it is almost lost. Before relating the story of Moshesh, let us try to obtain some impression of the background of his people, the *milieu* amid which he arose; and let us begin by making a qualification.

The Bantu of southern Africa, of whom the Basotho are a branch, show many indications of a common origin. All of them, in the songs and stories told and sung in their various languages, have similar harkbacks to a fragmentary contact with civilization at some remote date. All of them seem at one time to have inhabited a region further north. All of them in the course of centuries have moved southward. There is a great deal in their prehistoric knowledge and experience that is similar. In these pages we shall be considering a small section of the Bantu race, and much that will be described as Basotho may not be theirs exclusively. The Basotho can be considered alone, but they must not be thought of alone. They are one of a set of variations.

An old Basotho circumcision song runs: 'I am the elder, the first man of Him who bound up the wound. I did not clothe myself, but I have been clothed.' The name of this first man was Mopéli, or Tlaké, and his surname was Mosito, meaning the sinner. Out of deference to him the nature of his fault is not referred to; it is a mystery. Yet here, it would seem, in the hidden heart of Africa, is a harkback to original sin. Other harkbacks are that the first man emerged from reeds, and that smoke came out of a bush. When the first Basotho heard from the lips of French Protestant missionaries the story of Moses, there were some among them who considered that they had found here the identification of these tales in their own lore. Circumcision too is heavy with biblical overtones, and the secrecy and ritual that surround it, particularly among the Basotho, give it a promi-

ence as great as any it possessed among the Hebrews. Another link may lie in the important feast which the Basotho used in former times to hold at the new moon, and which some of the earlier French missionaries considered may have originated in the cult of the Egyptian god Thoth, who had the crescent moon in his hair.

Yet these contacts, if they existed at all, seem to have been vestigial. Knowledge of agriculture, thatching, and pottery may stem from them, but with these came little else. No knowledge of writing was acquired, and nothing concerning time or astronomy. This last is a particularly striking gap. With their herds of cattle, and their flocks of sheep and goats, the Basotho are as much a pastoral people as an agricultural one, and every pastoral community knows what it is to sit watchful at night beneath the stars. Yet the Basotho of old had no name for any star or constellation.

As for time, the Basotho had only one clear concept – the division of night and day. Despite their new moon feast, the month was not regarded as a unit of time. Neither, strictly speaking, was the year, which was deemed to have begun when grass and leaves appeared, and thus varied in length depending on the severity of the winter. That no one knew anyone's age was compensated for by a strict hierarchic awareness of each person's seniority in the tribe.

The earliest known staple was millet, to which was later added (from other African tribes who had it from the Portuguese) maize, now Basutoland's main crop. Such agricultural methods as they acquired were rudimentary. Before sowing they simply scratched the soil with hoes, the plough being unknown. They had no vegetable cultivation, the pumpkins and other green things they ate having seeded themselves. For reasons unknown, but a very long time ago, they lost contact with civilization. With their small corpus of agricultural knowledge, to which for hundreds of years nothing was added, in the empty continental wilderness of the tableland of Africa they were like a ship at sea. They had what they had, and nothing more.

They are often loosely described as nomadic, but in fact they are not nomads. Their deepest instinct is to settle in one place and utilize what is around them; they are great lovers of home. But in the conditions of the tableland they did not know how to

PREHISTORIC BACKGROUND

make a permanent home. When grass and earth were exhausted around them, there was nothing for it but to move on and make another settlement, again impermanent. Sometimes doubtless they were forced to move by pressures from other tribes. Another impetus to movement was a tradition that the grown-up sons of a chief should not live in the same place as their father. When a chief's son came of age, his father 'placed' him, with a group of friends of his own age, usually those who had attended the same circumcision lodge (see p. 76), in a new area of the chief's choosing. The headquarters of the tribe thus changed its position from generation to generation. The trend of this movement was southward.



The way people still count in the villages of Basutoland takes us back to these early times. In this system there are five numerals, counted on the left hand, beginning with the little finger, ending with the thumb. From there they cross to the thumb of the right hand, the expression for six being 'crossing over'. The index finger comes next, the word for seven being 'pointing'. The longest finger is then extended, leaving two fingers still turned

down, and eight is thus 'two down'. The expression for nine is 'one down', and ten is 'complete'. There are twenties and thirties and hundreds and thousands in the scheme, but doing arithmetic or telling the time in it is a lengthy business: 2.30 p.m. in Sesotho is *hora ea bobeli le metsotso e mashomé a mararo*. Needless to say, most educated Basotho today express numerals in English.

The Basotho calendar is another link with the past, and provides a picture of the old agricultural life. Though there was no concept of months, the year was divided into twelve phases, the duration of which depended on the weather. The first phase, usually occurring in August or September, was *Loetsé*, the sharpening, when grass and leaves appear. Next came *Mphalané*, the whistle, the whistles being made of dry maize stalks blown by the herdboys. After this came *Pulungoana*, the time of the calving of the Kudu cattle, followed by *Tsitoe*, the grasshopper, when the weather warms up and the grasshoppers are chirruping. About January or February it was *Pherekhong*, club-erecting, when young women and girls build temporary huts near sown fields and stay there, forming a temporary society, to scare off the birds. Then came *Hlakola*, the time of cleanness, when the last pollen falls from the millet; *Hlakubélé*, grain and corn, when the millet begins to produce grains; *Mésa*, roasting, the time of corn on the cob; *Motséanong*, laughing at the birds, when the grains are so hard that the birds cannot eat them. Next came *Phupjané*, the small stack, when women begin to pick the fallen heads of corn and stack them, after which came *Phupu*, the big stack, the time of harvesting. With winter came the last phase, *Phato*, the lodge, the time for boys of suitable age to be joined in lodges of initiation, and be ritually circumcized.*

The Bantu of southern Africa have two main streams of language, the Nguni and the Sotho, the language of the Basotho being classified as Southern Sotho, spoken mainly in Basutoland, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal, though a man of the Basotho can make himself understood in Bechuanaland, where the main languages belong to the same Sotho group, and can find some means of communication even as far north as Zambia. He

*The orthography of Sesotho is based on French, but in conformity with South African custom it is written omitting the accents. A final 'e' should usually be read as 'é'; 'oa' is 'wa'; and 'ph' is not 'f' but an aspirated 'p'. In French the sound of the words is more transmutable; Loetse becomes *Loetsé*, Tsitoe becomes *Tsitoe*, etc.

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finds it less easy to communicate with the Xhosa and Zulu of South Africa, or with people from Swaziland, whose languages belong to the Nguni group. No Bantu form of speech had a script prior to the coming of Europeans to Africa.

Southern Sotho, despite a limited vocabulary, is an accurate vehicle of expression on traditional subjects. The first French missionaries were impressed by the way in which, though without script, it had strict grammatical rules. It has the characteristic of doing to the front of words what we do to the back of them. With us, to achieve the plural of a song we add 's' at the end and make songs. With the Basotho it is the front of the word that creates this effect. Thus a man of that tribe is a Mosotho, more than one are Basotho, their language is Sesotho, and their country is Lesotho.

The word Bantu too requires explanation. This word is the plural of Muntu in languages of the Nguni group, implying a human being. In Sesotho the corresponding word in the singular is Motho, meaning, if it can be translated at all, He Who Speaks, in other words he who is different from animals, who have no speech. It is also an appropriate name for what is in effect a race of debaters.

There was no cohesion among the people of the Sotho group; they had no overall leader or organization. They lived in small scattered groups, each under a chief. If a group grew too large for one man to command, it would splinter, the rival candidate for chieftainship moving off with his followers. The main contact between different groups was plundering one another's cattle and fighting.

The beliefs of the Basotho were dominated by an absolute sense of the omnipotence of the spirit world. The corollary to this was an equally absolute disinclination to believe that man could have power to act in such a way as to influence the course of things. To aid man in his powerlessness, assistance was sought from spirits who were believed to be those of the departed ancestors. Beyond them lay a more powerful being, the Ancestor of Old, between whom and human beings the 'young' ancestors were intermediaries. As always among people who believe in their powers, spirits made their presence abundantly evident. Visions, portents, startling psychic phenomena, possession by spirits – these were the stuff of daily life. A spirit world, contain-

ing far more evil elements than good, battered on the Basotho people and thrived on their fear, which for the spirits was the material nourishment they needed.

Naturally, in such a situation, those who could be counted on to contact the spirits when their advice was urgently required occupied a position of special importance. These were the tribal doctors, who were consulted by chiefs on all important matters, and who consulted the spirits by means of divination bones cast on the ground.

Another form of aid the people sought was medicine to increase the individual power of life in men and things. Here again the doctors came in, the preparation of the medicines being their responsibility and professional secret, though they might ask the chiefs or the people to obtain some of the ingredients for them. Most of the medicine was compounded of herbs and the flesh of animals. Medicine smeared on sticks driven into the ground at the side of a field caused the crop sown there to sprout with greater vigour. Medicine placed at the gate of a kraal caused the cattle to produce numerous and healthy calves. Medicine, in a word, increased the shadow of things.

A shadow among the Basotho is by no means the simple thing it is in Europe or America. A shadow, by its very insubstantiality, connects with the spirit world, the repository of ultimate power. Thus in the old days shadows were of importance, and had to be defined with exactitude; and in the language these definitions still remain. The shadow of a tree, *moriti*, must not, for example, be confused with the shadow of a cloud, which is *lesuiti*. Furthermore, to the many who still cling to these things, there are male and female shadows, the distinction between which is not expressed in words, but is nonetheless important.

Of all the shadows the most important was *seriti*, the shadow of a person, to increase the strength of which the most powerful medicine was required. This consisted of human flesh preferably taken from a living body, the most potent parts of the body in this respect being those most closely connected with life – the tongue and throat, the eyes, the sex organs, and the entrails which were the seat of life.

Those particularly in need of this medicine were chiefs, for they above all had to act as individuals, and stood most in need of power to influence the course of things. Warfare between tribes

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provided a convenient method of obtaining the ingredients, and a chief who wished to safeguard the strength of his shadow would arrange for the bodies of his fallen enemies to be appropriately dealt with. In times of peace a victim would be selected from among the tribe. The human remains thus gathered were handed to the tribal doctor, who from them compounded the medicine, which was squeezed into a horn and sealed with dust and animal fat. For a successful chief the possession of a strong medicine horn was essential. If it were strong enough it could even render him invulnerable. Whenever he felt his shadow weakening, or on occasions when he required it to be specially strong, he would have an incision made in his flesh, and cause the wound to be anointed with medicine from the horn. When 'placing' a son, who perchance had not had the opportunity to obtain a medicine horn for himself, the chief would cause the young man to be similarly anointed, conferring on him the power to maintain sway over his followers. Spirits and medicine, and the doctors who were connected with both, dominated the religious life of the tribe.

Day was beneficent, night malignant. Nothing concerned with life – hair, fingernails, water, cow dung – was allowed to be thrown out of a house after dark. All must be gathered in and protected, like human life itself, from night's malevolent influences. Cow dung was included in this because it was cow dung placed beneath the ashes of a dying fire which kept the fire alight all night, and fire was life.

Cattle was wealth, and care had to be taken to safeguard cattle. No woman was permitted to enter the gate of a cattle kraal – into the area, that is to say, covered by medicine for the fertility of the cows. Should a woman enter, she would break the efficacy of the medicine, due to a woman's female shadow being stronger than that of a cow. For much the same reason no woman was permitted to pass through a herd in a field.

Cotton and other textiles were unknown; the people clothed themselves with plaited grass and the skins of animals. Food consisted of porridge and a leathery kind of dough made from millet (later from maize), cow's milk, and such vegetables as would seed themselves. At a feast meat would be taken, but except when occasion demanded a feast there was a reluctance to kill for food, cattle being wealth. Salt was unknown.

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A man might have as many wives as he could support, but the generality of men had one wife. Much in advance of the Bushmen who preceded them in southern Africa, the Basotho had recognized degrees of marriage, and marriage itself was a contractual bond signified by the presentation of an agreed number of cattle by the bridegroom to the family of the bride. The bride's family were responsible for the wedding feast, and it was they who provided the beasts to be slaughtered for it. The underlying principle of the bridegroom's gift of cattle to the bride's family was that without such a gift any child born to the girl would bear the name of her own clan by right. The gift of cattle enabled the bride's future children to bear the name of their father's clan.



3. MOHLOMI, THE FORERUNNER OF A NEW AGE

THE French Protestant missionaries, who in the first decades after their arrival made widespread inquiries into Basotho lore as a means of establishing something of the people's historical background, estimated that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the ancestors of the present-day Basotho were dwelling in southern Bechuanaland and the western Transvaal, only a few hundred miles north of where they are now. In the seventeenth century they reached what is today the Orange Free State, at that time an empty region inhabited only by small scattered groups of primitive Bushmen living in caves and hunting with poisoned arrows. In the same century, in 1652, Jan van Riebeeck landed at the Cape, founding there a Dutch East India Company revictualling station for ships plying between Europe and the East. Thus at the same time, and for many years unbeknown to each other, in what is now South Africa two newly arrived races were establishing themselves.

Between about 1666 and 1690, long before the two races knew of each other's existence, some of the leading groups that later came to form the Basotho nation reached the present-day north-western frontiers of Basutoland. Prominent among these tribes was the Bakuena, who in the following century inhabited what is now the Orange Free State district of Ficksburg, adjacent to the Leribe (in French, *Lérivé*) district of Basutoland. From about 1750 to 1815 – during the time when Basotho came to know of the existence of white men but had never seen one – the Bakuena were ruled by a chief of great renown named Mohlomi, who was a psychic, a rainmaker, a healer, a famed arbiter of disputes, and a man of peace. Unlike other chiefs, who lived in suspicion one of another and very seldom met, Mohlomi was deeply interested not only in his own tribe, the members of which he loved as his own children, but in all the other tribes of whom he had heard tell. A great part of his life was spent visiting these tribes and their chiefs, and such was his reputation for wisdom and integrity that many brought their cases before him and received

his decisions. The journeys he made in his long life of 95 years took him over a great area, reaching far into the Transvaal and Bechuanaland. In the words of the French missionary Thomas Arbousset (1810-77), he was 'a king errant'.

Mohlomi was circumcized when he was 13, which was about the year 1733. One night in the hillside loneliness of the circumcision lodge, when his companions were all asleep, he saw that above him the roof of the hut had opened, and through this opening he was lifted up into the skies to a place where there was a great concourse of people. In that hour he received much wisdom, and when it was time to return he was told, 'Go, rule by love, and look on thy people as men and brothers'.

For a chief's son it was revolutionary and seemingly impractical advice, but Mohlomi obeyed it, becoming a chief like no other before him, a revolutionary of peace and common sense. Furthermore, he proved that it was possible to rule without the aid of medicine, and without asking the doctors to cast their bones. Throughout his long life he had no serious trouble, either from his own people or from neighbours, his most dangerous moment being when, on a distant journey among an unknown tribe, he discovered he was amongst cannibals. He used medicine only when he was making rain, and this was a secret medicine which he mixed himself in the solitude of his own hut, where in darkness he stirred it as he communed with the spirits who guided him; and many and famous were the occasions when he was answered, and the rain came.

● Not content, moreover, with ignoring the doctors, he spoke everywhere against them, missing no opportunity of putting them to the test, publicly demonstrating that their bones divined nothing and that the doctors themselves were a bunch of worthless charlatans. Everywhere he sought to free people from the thralldom of fear in which they were immersed, as if mesmerized by it.

When visiting other chiefs, he would cement his friendship with them by marrying one of their daughters. When the time came for him to leave the area, he would endow his new wife with a hut in her father's village, and with numerous cattle from those he received as gifts for his healing, and he would give his wife permission to select a male friend to live with her, her children being provided for, whether fathered by himself or by the friend.

He was a collector of curios, and at his home village he had what amounted to a small museum of the strange things he had collected from far and wide. Of all these objects the most marvellous was a linen handkerchief which he had bought from a man who had had it from a Portuguese trader. People travelled long distances to come and behold it, and marvel.

One day in the year 1811, when Mohlomi was over 90, he was visiting the region of Butha Buthe in the north of Basutoland, and among the many people who came to pay their respects and listen to his wisdom was a distant kinsman named Mokhachané, who was accompanied by his 26-year-old son Lepoqo. Mokhachané was a man of little importance, still less his son, and there was no reason why the revered and venerable chief should take special notice of them. But Mohlomi, as we have said, was a psychic, and when he saw the son Lepoqo, he rose from his place, and detaching one of his own long ear-rings, he fastened it to the young man's ear, saying, 'This is the sign of power'. And he prophesied concerning Lepoqo, foretelling the day when he would be a ruler of men, advising him to understand men well and to judge them justly.

When Lepoqo heard these words his heart trembled, for since boyhood he had desired to be the ruler of all his people, but could not see how this should come about; and he was emboldened to ask the question that lay closest to his heart. What medicine, he asked Mohlomi, had the great chief used to acquire and maintain such power? To this the old chief gave a revolutionary answer: 'Power is not acquired by medicine; the heart is medicine.'

With this Mohlomi gave young Lepoqo much counsel, telling him never to trust the doctors, whose works were fraudulent, never to order death at a doctor's behest, but to rule with love and justice to all, and to be a man of peace. He advised him to marry many wives as a means of ensuring harmony among the tribes, and always to relieve the downtrodden and the distressed, who would reward him with fidelity and be drawn within his shadow, they and their descendants. And Mohlomi gave Lepoqo an ox, a shield, and a spear, and – an astonishing act in a chief to a young man – had a beast slaughtered in his honour.

His advice came strangely to Lepoqo, who, a violent young man, had already killed in cold blood five men who had offended

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him. Yet as Mohlomi had done when he himself had received the injunction, Lepoqo perceived in the inward of his soul that the words were true; and like Mohlomi, he followed them.

This Lepoqo was he who a few years later came to be called Moshesh, and to be the founder of the Basotho nation, the guide and law-giver of his people. Thus the wisdom vouchsafed to Mohlomi in his boyhood vision, and in his subsequent communion with spirits, passed on to him who would use it in the interests of enlightenment, and as the means of his people's salvation.



4. THE WARS OF THE LIFAQANE

FOUR years later, in 1815, Mhlomi lay on his deathbed, around which his guiding spirits gathered to escort him to the place of the ancestors. As so often before, they told him of the future, and summoning his senior wife, his ever-faithful and well-beloved Maliépollo, he prophesied for the last time, advising his wife to depart from this part of the country, upon which the direst ill would shortly fall. As he spoke and died, his prophecy was already in the process of fulfilment.

Away to the east, where the tableland ends and in the staggering drop of the Drakensberg sinks down to the green plains of Natal, a chief named Dingiswayo had since 1780 been pursuing a policy based on the assumption that Umveli, the father of people (a Nguni version of Mopéli, the Basotho's first man), did not wish his children to continue fighting each other for ever. The way to end fighting was to unite all under one leader, namely Dingiswayo. Thus to make peace Dingiswayo made war, attacking and subduing the tribes about him till his dominion was greatly extended. To increase the ardour of his warriors he ordered that no young man might be circumcized till all the tribes were united. This, meaning that no young man could get married, had a powerful effect on military efficiency, but it did not prevent unfortunate accidents. One such befell in the case of Senzagakona, the young uncircumcized chief of an obscure conquered tribe called the Amazulu, and his vile-tempered fiancée Nandi, who gave birth to a son named Chaka (1783-1828). This man, whose temper was even more monstrous than that of his mother, quarrelled with his father and threw himself at the mercy of Dingiswayo, who in a moment of unwisdom befriended him, giving him charge of a regiment.

When his father, the chief of the Amazulu, died, Chaka claimed the inheritance, which Dingiswayo, having in mind Chaka's bastard origin, refused him, thereby determining Chaka to wreak vengeance on Dingiswayo. On the next occasion when Dingiswayo was attacking a tribe, Chaka entered into

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secret negotiations with the enemy and encompassed the downfall of his prince, who was captured in battle and slain. Thereafter by intrigue and stratagem, Chaka caused himself to be named chief of the combined tribes, continuing Dingiswayo's policy of war, but with a ruthlessness and ferocity such as southern Africa had not seen before.

Natal, as we earlier observed, is another world from Basutoland, which towers seemingly impenetrable above it; and of Dingiswayo's great deeds scarcely even an echo had penetrated over the Maluti mountains to the tableland. The influence of Chaka's wars not only vaulted the Drakensberg, but inflicted upon Basutoland ten years of horror such as that country will never forget. Fleeing from the indiscriminate slaughter which was Chaka's manner of dealing with those who opposed him, from 1822 onwards entire tribes, or what was left of them after the butchery of the Zulu, struggled up the daunting mountainsides with such of their cattle as they could save. The old or the young who fell by the way were killed by the pursuers. Bearing with them no food, and traversing land that produced none, the tribes driven out of the plains arrived on the heights decimated, hungry, and desperate. There they found other tribes whom they fell upon in their own struggle for survival, and who in their turn fell back upon others. Meanwhile refugees continued to brave the slopes of the Drakensberg, forcing those before them to flee from desperation equal to their own. Over the mountains and valleys of Basutoland descended the anarchy, the slaughter, the unchronicled confusion of the Lifaqane Wars, the wars of migration, during which entire populations fought each other for existence.

In the Maluti mountains within very few weeks every crop, ripe or unripe, gathered or ungathered, had been eaten, nearly every animal slain, and many of the people reduced to cannibalism. Where possible the victims were from other tribes, but as the ghastly decade continued, sons came to eat their aged parents and mothers their own children. Some of those who did so, and who in later life became Christians, recounted in detail to the French missionaries the anguish and horror of those days. Such were those who took human life in the extremity of hunger. Others, some of them with traditions of cannibalism in their past, reverted to it and to the rituals that went with it, in which

THE WARS OF THE LIFAQANE

women and children, encircling the victims and dancing, sang songs of hideous jubilation as the limbs were cut from the living bodies and put into the pot.

Moshesh was not in the mountains when the Lifaqane broke over Basutoland, but he was in an equally perilous position on one of the main routes of entry into the territory from across the Drakensberg. Since his meeting with Mohlomi his affairs had prospered, and by a policy of shrewdness, fair-dealing, firmness, and generosity he had gathered about himself some 2,000 souls, and was on his way to becoming a chief of some consequence, though recognized as such by few. In 1822 he was installed near Butha Buthe, a lowland area in the north of Basutoland, into which the first wave of the Lifaqane debouched from Natal. At the first encounter Moshesh's men were defeated, and he was forced to retreat with all his people and cattle to the flat top of a nearby mountain, leaving his agricultural lands below in the hands of the invaders, who devoured all his crops. Another wave of invaders followed.

Moshesh's position was exceedingly vulnerable. His mountain was easy of access in some places, and to obtain food and water, forays had to be made daily into the domain of the enemy scattered about him. Foreseeing that his downfall was ultimately certain if he remained in such a place, he lent a ready ear when it was reported to him that away to the south there was a country with few inhabitants, where there were natural mountain fortresses which could easily be made impregnable. Sending one of his men as a scout to accompany his informant, he bade them seek out such a mountain and inform him.

The two men journeyed south-westward through the dangerous lowlands, inspecting numerous flat-topped mountains, until they came to one which in the distance looked so insignificant as to be scarcely a mountain at all, yet which, when one drew near and stood beneath its unpretentious slopes, revealed itself as a formidable place of safety, its flat rim ringed with a massive line of overhanging rock which might have been shaped by military engineers so absolute an obstacle did it provide to access. The summit of the mountain, to which there were only two small, well-concealed approaches, consisted of a fertile, grass-covered plateau of considerable extent, towards one side of which, as if provided expressly for Moshesh's purpose, was a

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spring of clear water. This was the mountain they chose, and from their choice stems the history of Basutoland.

When they returned to Moshesh with news of their discovery, the young chief resolved to move to the unknown mountain with all his people, their cattle and possessions. It was not an easy task. It was in the early months of 1824, and before them lay winter. For many months they had been surrounded and in a state of siege; provisions were running low; they were outnumbered by their besiegers. To lead the people out in such circumstances would mean total annihilation by foes and by hunger.

In his predicament Moshesh sent a message to one of the most depraved groups in the region, a clan of cannibal Zulu who had formerly tried to murder him. In his message he drew the Zulu's attention to the numerous cattle in the plains surrounding him, and to the high desirability of seizing them from their owners. As Moshesh calculated they would, the Zulu bit, and within a few days, from the precarious safety of their mountain-top, Moshesh and his people were looking down on their besiegers engaged in battle with the most unmitigated scoundrels in the neighbourhood. With concern Moshesh saw the Zulu driven off, the besiegers victorious. Without concern he listened to the taunts yelled up to him, describing him and his men as cowards.

The next two days the besiegers spent burying their dead. Only then did they realize how many they had lost, and a mood of disillusion came over them. On the third day they had gone.

Spies having reported that they had headed along the lowlands in the direction of Leribe, Moshesh saw that if he was to reach his new mountain he must avoid the easy route. He chose therefore a route of relatively greater safety, through what are now known as the foothills, the land of exposed heights and precipitous valleys, ribs of mountain and zones of trackless, lofty emptiness, which are the mounting prelude to the Maluti. Travelling always against the natural lie of the land, it was a journey of almost incredible difficulty. Even today, with canned rations and all the paraphernalia of modern camping, few would find it easy to retrace the footsteps of Moshesh and his people. In the course of the journey Moshesh's grandfather, unable to keep up with the rest, was seized and devoured by cannibals.

In July 1824, in the depth of winter, with its cloudless blue days and its nights deep below freezing, Moshesh reached his

mountain, on the summit of which he installed himself and his people and all that they had. They were starving, and it would seem that at first they lived by plundering nearby people of their grain, in defiance, it is said, of the wishes of Moshesh, who endeavoured to treat with the local chief. Whatever the story of the first months on the mountain – and since it is prior to the time of recorded history there are inevitable discrepancies – the outcome was that the people of Moshesh, impregnable on a height, cultivated the land in the plains around them, and that the name of Moshesh was greatly enhanced. Before a year was out, another group in search of security had sought his protection and settled near him. In the succeeding years others did likewise.

Moshesh's mountain, from which Basutoland developed, is situated well into the western lowlands, only 17 miles inward from Maseru, the present capital. The name it acquired was Thaba Bosiu, meaning a mountain at night, a reference to the curious fact that by day it is indistinguishable, whereas beneath its mere 300-ft. slopes at night it appears truly for what it is. Somehow – perhaps from the name – the story spread in Moshesh's time that the mountain had the magical quality of enlarging at night, a tale which Moshesh wisely permitted to spread uncontradicted.

When his position was threatened by a tribe who were among Chaka's enemies, Moshesh sent gifts to Chaka. At times he sent gifts to both. The shifts and turns of Moshesh's diplomacy during these years have an Elizabethan astuteness about them, reposing – as Elizabeth's did – in the reality of the possession of an island; and though the Zulu armies wrought havoc in many parts of the region, Moshesh remained unmolested, his people and his cattle increasing. Here he would befriend a man known to have wronged him; there he would capture a chief who had attacked him, and instead of putting him to death would send him back to his own people with a gift of cattle. It was a policy running contrary to all that had gone before, keeping fighting to the minimum, and avoiding making permanent enemies. To traditionalist African chiefs it looked like weakness, yet it bred a continually gathering strength. Before he had been on Thaba Bosiu six years Moshesh was the most considerable chief among his people.

Then, in 1830, the Basotho discovered that further west of them on the tableland there were people of another race.

5. THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

SINCE 1652 the Dutch station at the Cape had developed into a colony of settlers, mainly of Dutch, German, and French Huguenot origin, who by intermarriage came to form the Afrikaner people, speaking a language closely resembling Flemish. Due to them, the zone of European influence had extended eastward from the Cape into the more accessible parts of the southern coastal strip fringing the waterless and unpromising tableland.

In 1795, when Holland was invaded by the armies of revolutionary France, Great Britain, at the request of the Dutch Crown, took possession of the Cape as a precautionary measure. In 1802, by the Peace of Amiens, the territory reverted to republican Holland; but when shortly afterwards Napoleon set about the military conquest of Europe, and Holland was one of his satellites, the British Government resolved that the Cape, due to its extreme importance on the trade route to the East, must be annexed and held in permanency. In 1806 Britain for the second time assumed control, and by the Congress of Vienna in 1815 the colony became a British possession. In 1820 the first batch of British immigrants landed at what is now Port Elizabeth.

The British administration at Cape Town was considerably more vigorous and organizing than any government experienced hitherto. To the older colonists, Calvinist and Dutch-speaking, the new administration was foreign not only in the language it spoke, but in the ideas it expressed – ideas which, for reasons which defied Afrikaner comprehension, were called liberal and enlightened. In Afrikaner eyes well-organized government was interference with human freedom, while some of the more extraordinary pronouncements of the English, such as that all races were created equal in the sight of God, were in their paler colours the irresponsible claptrap of crackpots, in their darker the work of the devil. In sum, the English administration at Cape Town was something to be out of the way of; the zone of European influence extended, as individual Afrikaner farmers sought

to put distance between themselves and the Cape; the first explorers mounted the tableland in search of a land of their own away from British influence. The mood which eventually brought about the Great Trek had set in.

The first people from the Cape to reach and settle in the Orange Free State, and whom the Basotho encountered, were half-caste groups, the fruit of illegitimate liaisons between Afrikaners and women of other races, who, unrecognized and unwanted in Cape society, had formed themselves into gangs of desperadoes, living by cattle-raiding and hunting. They were variously known as Griquas, Koranas, Hottentots, or quite plainly as Bastards. In their armed encounters with these people the Basotho first came to know of firearms and horses. They were initially uncertain about the relationship between these two phenomena, and on the first occasion when they killed off a band of Bastards who had got drunk on millet beer, they watched the horses carefully for several hours without daring to approach too near, in case it was something to do with the horses that caused the guns to go off.

The Bastards' predilection for liquor stood Moshesh in good stead, and by making night raids on their encampments he kept this new menace at bay, capturing as many muskets and horses as possible, and learning how to use them. In a short time the Basotho of Moshesh became what they have remained to this day, a mounted people, and the provision of arms for his men became a cardinal point in Moshesh's policy.

* * *

But despite this modernization in his methods of warfare, and despite his success in uniting the tribes about him, Moshesh knew that his people's position was fundamentally as precarious as it had ever been. Once the sure hand of his diplomacy was withdrawn, they would be lost; and in his middle 40s, with twenty years of chieftainship behind him, there were signs that he was growing tired of it all. One might strive for peace, strive to rule with justice and moderation; there seemed to be no end to war and human violence.

The outpost of Christian civilization at this time and in this region was Philippolis, named after Dr. John Philip of the London Missionary Society, and situated in the south-west of the Orange Free State, some 160 miles south-west of Thaba Bosiu.

At Philippolis the London Missionary Society and the Wesleyans worked amid a motley community of half-castes which new arrivals from Europe usually considered to be one of the saddest and most dreadful societies they had ever seen.

In the early months of 1833 a mulatto of Philippolis, by name Adam Krotz, tall and black as night, a hunter and a man of intelligence, was exploring the country away to the north-east, guided by men of that region from whom he had heard of the devastations of the Lifaqane, when two Africans unknown to him came to invite him to visit their chief, who they said was named the King of the Mountain. Krotz accompanied them to Thaba Bosiu where, speaking through interpreters, Moshesh explained that he had sent for him in the hope that Krotz might perchance be able to give him advice on the means of ensuring peace and prosperity to his people.

Adam Krotz replied that he thought what Moshesh needed was a missionary. These, he explained, were white men, but they were men of peace, respected by other white men, who listened to their words; and wherever they settled the land would become a place of peace. As before with Mohlomi, they were strange words, but Moshesh knew within himself that they were true. Entrusting Adam Krotz with a hundred head of cattle, he bade him return to Philippolis and obtain a missionary for him.

A few months earlier, on 11th November 1832, three young French missionaries had sailed from Gravesend in the English brig *Test*, bound for Cape Town, a journey which took them three and a half months. They were presbyterians, members of the Société des Missions Evangéliques in Paris. Two of them, Eugène Casalis, aged 19, and Thomas Arbousset, aged 22, were ordained ministers; the third member of the group was Constant Gosselin, aged about 32, by profession a stonemason, who was to be in charge of works, buildings, and agriculture.

Casalis and Arbousset, who had been ordained together and were close friends, had for some months been training to go to Algeria, studying Arabic and the religion and customs of Islam. At the last moment they were told plans had been changed and they were going to southern Africa. They hastily switched from Arabic to English, and obtained useful introductions from the London Missionary Society, with which their own mission was in close touch.



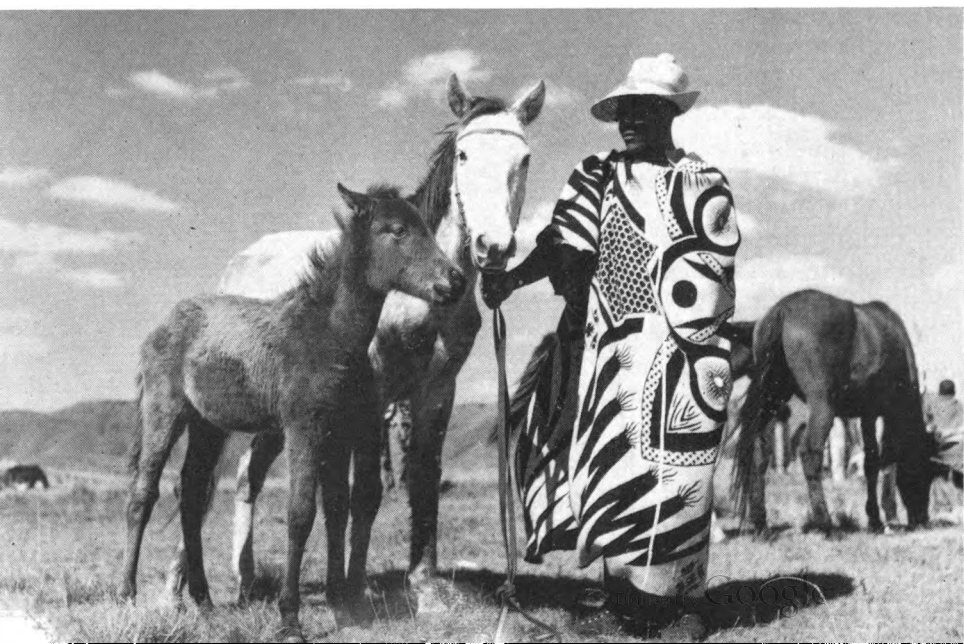
Moshesh,
the founder of the
Basotho nation, at the
time of his meeting
with Eugène Casalis
in 1833

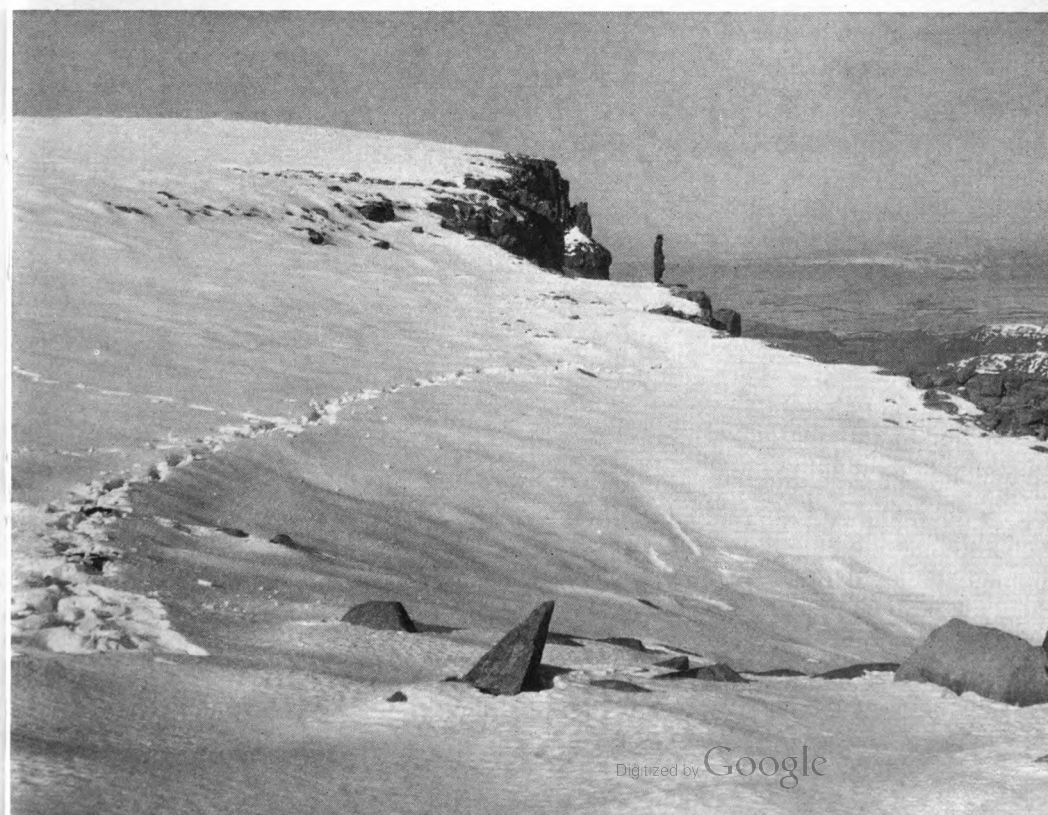
Eugène Casalis,
the French missionary
who became Moshesh's
political adviser,
a year earlier





Above: A land of height and immense visual distances, but no fences and scarcely a tree. *Below:* Everywhere men with horses and gaily coloured blankets. *Above right:* Up in the Maluti mountains, a forbidding region of rugged splendour. *Below right:* A Mosotho policeman looks from the heights of the Drakensberg down to the plains of Natal





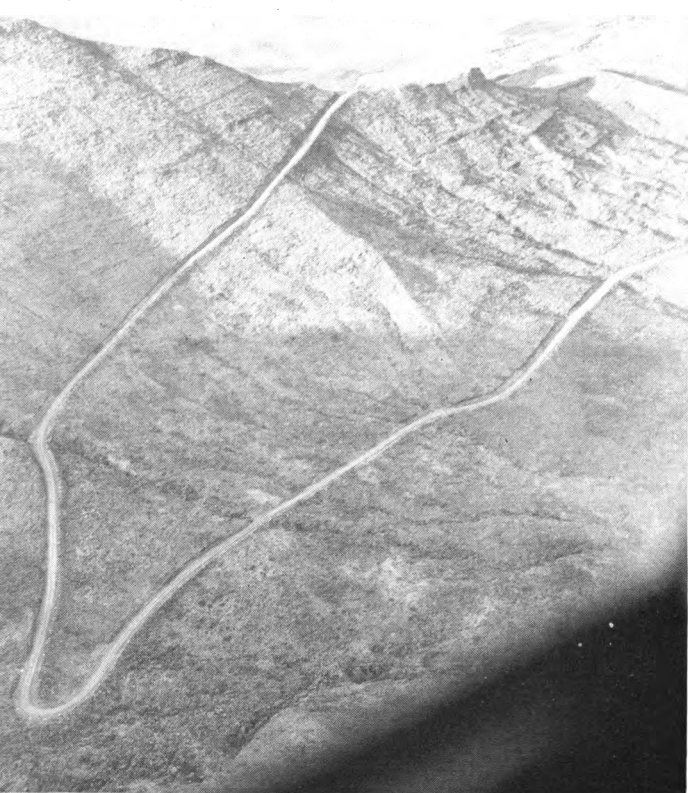


A round of 'marabaraba', a favourite and complicated game akin to the medieval pastime of Nine Men's Morris, played here with pebbles and bottle-tops

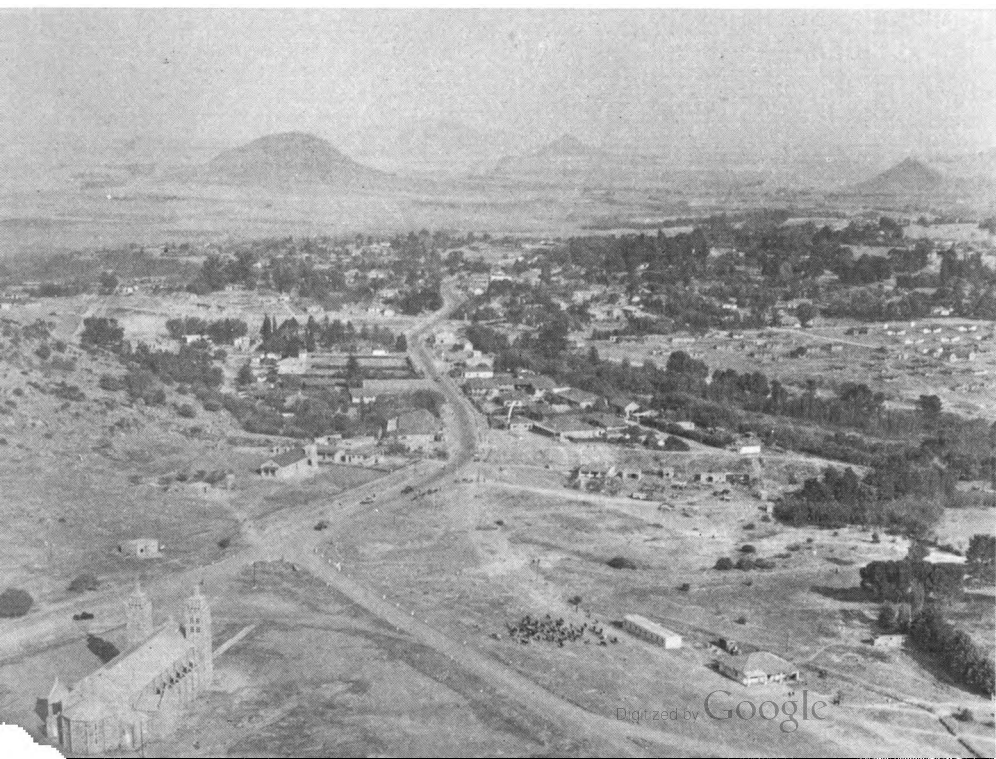


Above: Grain storage baskets. Though woven solely from thickly plaited grass they are totally water-tight. *Below:* Gentlemen of consequence. Women usually walk



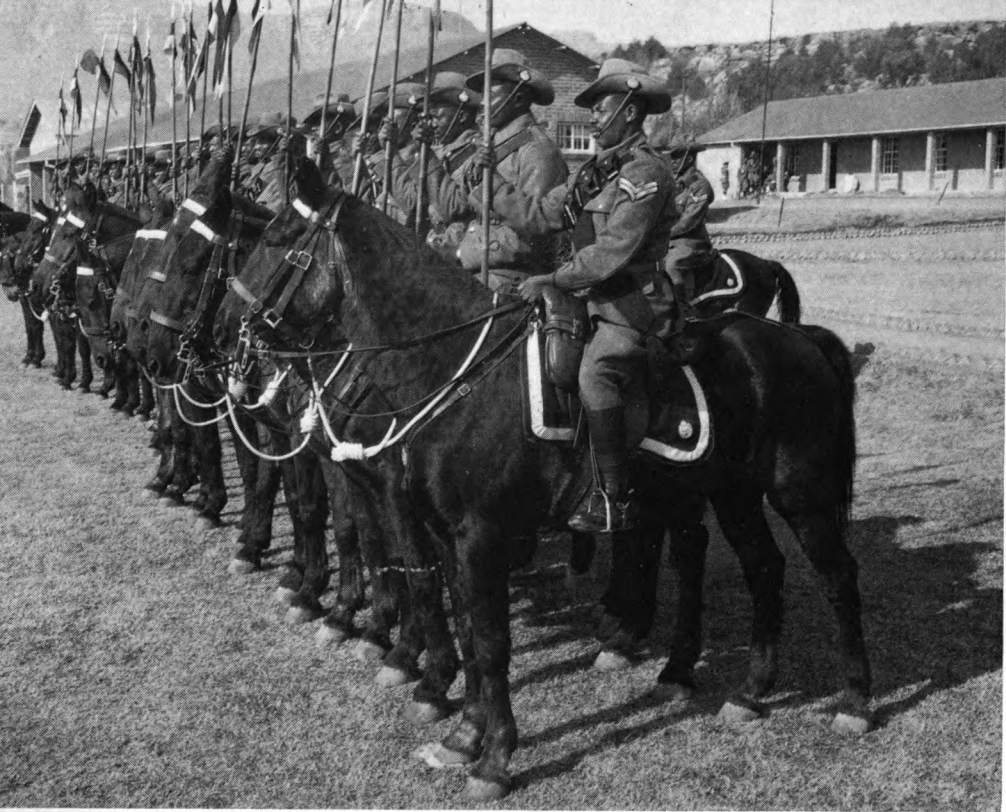


Roads have to be carved out of the landscape. This mountain road is near Maseru, the capital, seen from the air (*below*)





Potentially the most significant view in Basutoland:
Oxbow, site of the proposed hydro-electric scheme
which would divert water from the high-lying
Mabamatso river to the Caledon river valley.



Above: Awaiting inspection, a contingent of the Basutoland Mounted Police

Below: Ladies (a rug gives breathing space for babies) at Maseru Post Office



THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

But this was about the sum total of the preparations it was possible to make. Southern Africa was still largely unmapped, and contained vast areas into which no European had ever penetrated. Dr. Philip said that missionaries were urgently needed, but where and by whom nobody in Europe knew. Strangely haunted by the sense that somewhere in the unknown there was a people waiting for them, could they but reach them, they said goodbye to the familiar world, and sailed into the emptiness of the future.

Reaching the Cape, they found that information there was almost as sparse as in Europe. There was nothing for it but to take ship to Port Elizabeth, and from there advance by land northward into the interior. Which they did with two wagons, 24 oxen, and some Hottentots proficient at dealing with this peculiar form of transport. In a slow journey of innumerable difficulties they mounted the tableland and forded the Orange River. Thus they continued, with only the word 'north' as destination and with the stars to guide them – three men in search of a people.

They reached Philippolis and were preparing to continue a journey that was becoming forlorn, when Adam Krotz, the gift cattle having been plundered by a gang of marauders *en route*, returned to learn of the young men's arrival. To them he conveyed the message of the King of the Mountain, and for the first time the young men heard the name of the people who were waiting for them. If a writer of fiction had invented such a tale it would be described as lacking in verisimilitude. A few days later, accompanying Adam Krotz on another of his hunting expeditions, the three men were on their way to Thaba Bosiu.

In *Mes Souvenirs*, a delightful book of reminiscences written later in life, Eugène Casalis described their coming.*

"The entire land lying between the river and the foot of the mountain was covered with sorghum and maize. Following small paths obstructed by the broad leaves of these plants, we saw along the edge of the rocks a long line of human beings forming. At first I was tempted to take them for crows, so diminished in size were they by height and distance. Soon we dismounted, and leading our horses by the reins, we climbed as best

*So far as I can discover, Casalis' *Mes Souvenirs* has not been translated into English. These excerpt translations are thus my own.—A.C.

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we could up the rough ascent which still separated us from this impatient multitude. Near the top we made a short halt to get our breath, re-adjust our clothes somewhat, and acknowledge a salvo by which we were greeted. . . . As soon as we showed our faces there was a universal scramble, each one wishing to be the first to see us. But here advancing towards us comes a personage attired in the most fantastic manner, a long switch in his hand, growling and yapping like a dog. At his appearance everyone draws back, aligns themselves, and an immense semi-circle forms behind a man seated on a rush mat. "There's Moshesh," says Krotz to me. The chief's glance, majestic and benevolent, rests upon me. His profile, far more aquiline than is usual among his subjects, his prominent forehead, the broadness and regularity of his features, his eyes, somewhat tired yet at the same time full of intelligence and softness, made a vivid impression on me. I realized at once that I was dealing with a superior man, accustomed to think, to command others, and above all to be in command of himself. He appeared to be 45 years old. The upper part of his body, entirely naked, was perfectly formed, well-covered with flesh, but without obesity. I admired the graceful line of his shoulders and the sensitiveness of his hands. Falling loosely from around his waist he had a large cloak of panther skins as soft as the finest cloth, its folds covering his knees and feet. For sole adornment he had about his brow a string of beads from which a tuft of feathers was suspended, falling at the back of his neck; he wore on his right arm an ivory bracelet, the insignia of power, and some brass rings round his wrists.

'After we had looked at each other for a moment in silence he rose, saying to me, "*Lumèla lekhoa*", "Greetings, white man", and I answered by extending my hand to him, which he took without hesitation.'

For each of them it was about the most important moment in their lives. Casalis by this time was 20.

The missionaries asked for a piece of land on which to erect buildings and start a farm, both of which, they explained, would serve as a model to the Basotho, enabling them to learn how to raise their standards of living. Granting this request at once, Moshesh expressed his satisfaction. 'You behold our miseries,' he said. 'This country used to be full of inhabitants. Wars have devastated it. Multitudes have perished; others have sought refuge in strange lands. I have remained almost alone on this rock. I was told that you would be able to help us; you are promising us to do so. It is all I wish to know. Remain amongst us!'

Mokhachané, Moshesh's father, found his son's action incomprehensible, and took no notice of the missionaries; but as Casalis recorded:

'The mass of the people were far from sharing his disdainful indifference. The inhabitants of the area seemed to have completely for-

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gotten their occupations in order to give attention to us. With the curiosity we aroused was mingled plenty of fear. Women and children drew near us furtively, seating themselves at a respectful distance, huddled close together, espying our slightest movements, and exchanging their observations in low voices. If we happened to turn round suddenly, or showed signs of coming near them, everyone would fling themselves back with cries of alarm; the most cowardly ones scampered away as if they were afraid of being eaten. Men were not exempt from similar emotions, but they made it a point of honour to hide them. We discovered that these poor people had the greatest difficulty in believing that we were in fact men. They had seen close to, they had even killed in war, Koranas and Griquas, who were dressed more or less like us and had the same firearms. With such people their colour and their crimped hair left no doubt about their origin; but whites, to whom they had lent their clothes and their means of destruction, what were they? They even went so far as to ask themselves with fear whether we were not returned souls, a new variety of those spirits with whom their diviners claimed to have frequent encounters. It was a great relief to all when we, having discovered the existence of these doubts, encouraged the bravest to conduct on our persons such investigations as would reassure them. It was then established that our hair, despite its resemblance to baboons' fur, was in fact real hair, that our shoes and socks concealed toes, and that my spectacles did not form part of my physical structure. Seeing us eat and drink, it was evident that this act was accompanied for us by the same sensations as for the rest of the world. They learned with pleasure that we had fathers and mothers. Why had we no wives? To this our interpreter replied gently that this was probably because we were still too young, that whites married fairly late.

'These childlike or superstitious terrors contrasted strangely with the perfect naturalness, the confidence, which the chief and his immediate entourage showed in their dealings with us. Clearly Moshesh's was a superior mind, and he exercised a most marked influence on those directly in touch with him.'

The site they chose for their settlement was Morija, about 20 miles south of Thaba Bosiu. To ensure that they had all such requirements as the Basotho could provide, Moshesh sent his son and heir Letsie (in French, *Létsié*), to live in the same neighbourhood, where he founded Matsieng, the Place of Letsie, to this day the official seat of the Paramount Chief of Basutoland. The early years of the mission were largely spent grappling with the language, giving it an orthography, and undertaking the long and arduous task of translating the gospels, the church services, catechism, hymns, and educational works into Sesotho. But even before Casalis and Arbousset could speak the language properly

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they had already made contact with the people through music. With amazement they found themselves among a people with an extraordinary natural aptitude for singing in four-part harmony, and from this discovery a tradition developed in which children learned to read music, using the tonic sol-fa system, almost as soon as they learned to read and write.

Moshesh took a close personal interest in the religious side of the missionaries' work, listening attentively as Eugène Casalis struggled to express himself in Sesotho, and afterwards himself giving the people a commentary on what the white man had said, leaving Casalis amazed by the intuitive depth of his perception, and by his responsive understanding of these new and strange ideas, with which in a mysterious way he found himself in accord.

On their side the missionaries took a position from which neither they nor their successors ever wavered. As Casalis wrote at the time of the mission's foundation, 'We become Basotho. From today onwards our destinies and those of the tribe are identical'.



6. 'THE QUEEN'S SOLDIER'

THREE years later, in 1836, the scattered and scarcely organized movement known as the Great Trek began, when in the space of ten years about 10,000 Afrikaners laboured northward on to the tableland with their ox-wagons laden with household possessions, in search of a homeland out of the reach of British government. The plains, with their flat-topped mountains, stretching away to the west of Basutoland, and which had hitherto been a lawless waste, were rapidly peopled with white farmers laying claim to vast areas, in some of which, often even unknown to the newcomers, there were Basotho already established. Thence the trekkers moved eastward, passing north of Basutoland down to the plains of Natal, where in 1838, at the Battle of Blood River, the power of the Zulu was brought to an end. The rest of Moshesh's life was a long, complex, and often-changing diplomatic struggle to preserve the integrity and independence of his people from the race by which he was now totally surrounded.

The government in London were at this time generally disinclined to see the frontiers of empire any further extended. So far as they were concerned, if Afrikaners wished to make a life of their own beyond the borders of Cape Colony, that was their own affair. But with the collapse of Zulu power, anarchy set in over wide areas in Natal and along the Cape Colony borders, while with the arrival of whites in Natal a port was developing at Durban, which Cape Town merchants saw as a threat to their trade. In 1843 the British Government, with some reluctance, agreed to the annexation of Natal, causing quite a number of trekkers to return back over the Drakensberg.

Moshesh's problem with his new neighbours was basically a conflict between two entirely different systems of land ownership and use. A boundary was a concept unknown to Africans. Wherever there were Basotho owing allegiance to Moshesh, the land they grazed and tilled was his responsibility; and in this sense it could be said that his domain extended far into what is now the

Orange Free State. Thus when a group of Basotho raided the cattle of an Afrikaner farmer and the latter took reprisals, Moshesh considered that he had every right, indeed the duty, to come to the rescue of his Basotho. To the Afrikaners these raids, quite apart from the theft angle, were intrusions inside their boundaries, and when Moshesh sent aid to such raiders he was defending mischief-makers in areas which were Afrikaner property. A strongly held view among the farmers was that the power of Moshesh must be broken.

It was a moment when everything in Moshesh's instinct would normally have dictated his finding a means of reaching a diplomatic understanding with the Boers, an understanding which undoubtedly could only have been reached by his submitting to a considerable restriction in the area under his sway, perhaps even to ceasing effectively to be a chief. It was here that Eugène Casalis, who had a diplomatic sense as fine as Moshesh's and a far wider knowledge of the world, stepped into the position he was to occupy for the rest of his years in Basutoland, of being the chief's political adviser and, in effect, foreign secretary. Casalis was able to advise Moshesh that the white men he could see in the region were not nearly so important as the white men he could not see – the British at the Cape – friendship with whom must lie at the core of all his policy, since it was they who would ultimately determine the course of events. Moshesh, with his discerning instinct in respect of the unsubstantiated, listened to this advice.

In Dr. Philip of the London Missionary Society he had another friend. When in July 1842 Dr. Philip drew the Cape Governor's attention to the danger of Moshesh being suppressed by the Boers, and two months later a British proclamation appeared warning the Boers not to interfere with him, Moshesh had his first confirmation of the wisdom of Casalis' advice. His desire to be on good terms with the British increased.

In November 1843 an emissary of Sir George Napier, the Cape Governor, journeyed to Thaba Bosiu, where Moshesh signed his first treaty. By it he was to receive £75 annually from the Cape Treasury, or the equivalent in arms and ammunition, and keep order along his section of the Cape Colony frontier, surrendering criminals and fugitives to the British administration, of which he became the ally. By the Napier Treaty, to which Moshesh at-

tached great political importance, he became, in his own words, ‘the Queen’s soldier’. One of the problems of subsequent years was to make the Queen’s government aware of this fact and of its implications.

Accompanying the signed treaty he sent a letter which contained the first implied admission that he realized he had come face to face with boundary civilization, and that this new concept must be accepted in African life. The letter, like all his diplomatic correspondence at this time, was composed by Casalis. While encouraging others to learn to read and write, Moshesh never did so himself. Like other successful illiterate princes at all times in history, he doubtless felt he had done well enough as he was, and there were soon plenty of scribes to hand. In his letter to Napier he made what was in effect a gentleman’s agreement that the Governor would fix the boundaries of Basutoland in justice to the various interests concerned. This in Moshesh’s view meant that his country would extend well over half the distance from Thaba Bosiu to Bloemfontein, including the entire district of Thaba Nchu. Viewed exclusively from his own African angle this was a fully justifiable claim, but due to the fact that Boers, with European ideas about boundaries, were already farming there, it was doubtful in its realism.

The area was, and for many years remained, in a state of violent disorder. As a Boer farmer of those days once said, ‘I have been fighting Kaffirs since I was 11 years old, when my father’s house was burnt down in a Kaffir outbreak and we had to fight for our lives in the veld’. It was a time when men shot at sight, when for the Boers, even more than for the Basotho, who had their mountains to retreat to, the issue was human existence. In 1844, incensed by the depredations to which they were subjected from all sides, the Boers mustered an army and made war on the Griquas. A small force of British troops was sent north to quell the fighting. In a single engagement they dispersed the Boer force near Touwfontein, where they were joined by the new Governor of the Cape, Lieutenant-General Sir Peregrine Maitland, who called the chiefs of the region to meet him at that place, some 30 miles north of Philippolis. It was Moshesh’s first direct encounter with the power of Great Britain, and his first view of disciplined cavalry, by which he and his Basotho were profoundly impressed. That this small but organized force had with

so little trouble defeated the tough and unruly Boers came as the final confirmation Moshesh needed that his policy of friendship with the British was the right one.

Preparatory to assuming direct control over the Boer-occupied region, Maitland left behind him a detachment under Major Henry Warden, whose instructions included the defining of boundaries. Warden established himself at Bloemfontein, of which he was the founder, and with 58 men to control an area of 50,000 square miles of lawlessness, set about one of the most thankless tasks imaginable. So long as he defined nothing, disorder merely continued as usual; but the moment he determined a boundary there was uproar. Among the Basotho his name is quite unjustifiably a bad word to this day. Warden was asked to make a frontier, it is said, but instead he cut the country with a knife.

The boundary for Basutoland which he proposed is known in history as the Warden Line, and had the Basotho accepted it at once, their country would today be considerably larger than it is. But at that time such wisdom and foresight were beyond them. Instead they continued to argue (and fight neighbouring Afrikaner farmers), and when in 1848 Britain extended her frontiers in South Africa, and the Orange River Sovereignty was created, the Basutoland frontier was still undefined. During these years the Basotho had a number of military encounters with the British, in one of which the latter were decisively repulsed. Moshesh's self-confidence and determination to have his way on the frontier issue increased.

He might well have prevailed in the end, had the British maintained their hold on the region. But the London government's lack of enthusiasm for the increasing size of colonial possessions continued to be a constant in imperial affairs, and it now unexpectedly hardened into a determination to be rid of unprofitable burdens. In 1852 Britain withdrew from the Transvaal, and in 1854 she withdrew her frontier southward to the Orange River. In the place of the British administration, with which one could argue and score points, Moshesh found himself, with his frontier still undefined, the neighbour of an independent Boer republic, the Orange Free State.

In 1858 the Free State declared war on the Basotho. The war lasted a month and was an indeterminate affair. The Boers

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mustered an army of 1,500; Moshesh had at his disposal 10,000 armed and mounted men, but their powder was not particularly good and their fire was inaccurate. The Boer forces penetrated a good way into Basutoland, creating a fair amount of alarm; but when they saw what they were geographically up against they lost heart, and after some skirmishes asked for an armistice, which Moshesh conceded. Sir George Grey, the Governor of the Cape, was then asked to mediate, and decided in favour of the Warden Line, which left both sides equally exasperated.

But Moshesh had taken stock of the situation, realizing that, with the Boers as his neighbours, his only hope of continued security was to bring Basutoland under the direct suzerainty of Queen Victoria, whose soldier he still considered himself to be. The next Governor of the Cape, Sir Philip Wodehouse, arrived in Cape Town in January 1862 to find waiting for him a long communication from Moshesh putting forward this suggestion, and the following month the matter was discussed in detail at Thaba Bosiu with Joseph Orpen and John Burnet, the Governor’s selected negotiators. It was then discovered that, astute ruler that he was, Moshesh wanted the Queen’s suzerainty but not the complications of her government, still less her laws and the magistrates to enforce them, which would be ‘like a stone too heavy for the people to carry’. Moshesh’s evident intent to have closer relations nonetheless drew a cautious comment of benevolence from the Colonial Office in London.

In March 1864 Sir Philip Wodehouse came up to meet Moshesh, and accompanied by senior Afrikaner and Basotho representatives, personally inspected the line proposed for the north-western boundary. For the Basotho the situation had by this time become more serious. Jan Hendrik Brand, the newly elected, far-seeing, and statesmanlike President of the Orange Free State, had resolved upon the taking of Basutoland as a first step to the acquisition of a route to the sea through the Transkei, while to the east Theophilus Shepstone had ideas for extending the borders of Natal, Basutoland being his first objective. In the words of Casalis’ successor, Adolphe Mabilie (1836–94), Moshesh’s country had become Naboth’s vineyard.

Wodehouse’s careful examination of the proposed frontier, an action designed to end strife, in fact had the opposite effect, serving to pinpoint the inescapable fact that without an efficient

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and well-armed police force, which the Free State could not afford, there was no likelihood of the Basotho or the local Boers acknowledging any frontier anywhere. With Wodehouse out of the way, in May 1865 the Free State for the second time went to war with Moshesh and his people.

This time the Boers were on occasion able to put as many as 4,000 men into the field, Moshesh as many as 20,000. Once again the Boers made a penetration in force, and for several weeks Thaba Bosiu itself was besieged. Through inefficient fieldwork Brand failed to take this key point, though it was defended by a mere handful of Basotho, who in the end put the Boers to flight. This time, however, it was the Basotho who, knowing how narrowly they had missed defeat, lost heart. In August 1865 Moshesh wrote to Brand asking that Wodehouse be brought in to mediate, at the same time, in a letter to Wodehouse, reiterating his desire to be brought under the Queen's suzerainty. Brand's terms for peace, which included the cession to the Free State of a substantial area within the Warden Line, were rejected by Moshesh, and hostilities continued; but away in the Cape the Governor, who had no wish to see Brand obtain his opening to the sea, was advising the British Government of the need to take possession of Basutoland.

Early in 1866 one of the most experienced Afrikaner leaders, Jan Fick, led a spectacular and daring expedition from Leribe district far into the heart of the Maluti mountains, meeting little opposition, and demonstrating to the Basotho that the Maluti was not the final and impregnable region of retreat hitherto imagined. The psychological effect of the incursion was decisive. Moshesh sued for peace, which was signed in April 1866, a large part of the lowlands within the Warden Line being ceded to the Free State.

But the Afrikaners had not done with Moshesh yet. The ceded area had standing crops in it which the Basotho in due course harvested, replanting the fields at the earliest possible moment. Brand was called back to Bloemfontein to deal with the endless dissensions among his own people, and meanwhile Moshesh stayed impregnable on Thaba Bosiu. Once the harvest was in, he was again at war.

The Boers responded by making war not so much on people as on crops, forcing the Basotho to retreat to safe areas where they

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could grow food. It was an effective retaliation, needing far fewer men to conduct it, and Moshesh was quick to recognize its dangers. He wrote again urgently to Wodehouse asking for protection, describing himself and his people as 'the lice in the Queen's blanket'.

In January 1868 Wodehouse received the Colonial Office's permission to annex Basutoland to the province of Natal, a conclusion which he could not agree with. He replied to London, stressing the advisability of the country being treated as a separate native state, and was waiting for a reply when news of Afrikaner military successes, which threatened in a matter of weeks to extinguish what remained of Basutoland, determined him to act before it was too late. On 12th March 1868 a proclamation was issued declaring that henceforth 'the tribe of the Basutos shall be, and shall be taken to be, British subjects; and the territory of the said tribe shall be, and shall be taken to be, British Territory'.

The Colonial Office on second thoughts agreeing with Wodehouse's suggestion concerning the country's future status, Basutoland was a few months later placed under the direct control of the Governor in his capacity as High Commissioner for South Africa, the designation by which he was responsible for the administration of native states independent of the Colony.

At a meeting held in Basutoland on 15th April 1868, Moshesh publicly surrendered the country without terms to the Queen of England, the state to which his and his people's obduracy had reduced it being all too pitifully described in the words he used on that occasion: 'The country is dead. We are all dead. Take us and do what you like with us!'

Boundary negotiations with the Orange Free State were concluded in February 1869, a large area of agricultural land, which the Basotho could have had for the asking if they had listened to Warden, being ceded to the Orange Free State, of which it today forms the greater part of the districts of Fouriesbourg, Ficksburg, Ladybrand, Thaba Nchu, Wepener, and Zastron. The frontiers of Basutoland have not altered since.

A year later, on 11th March 1870, when the first British administrators had already arrived, and the complex laws and regulations of a new age for the Basotho had already been drafted, Moshesh died, aged 84. Though in his later years – and

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particularly after the return of Eugène Casalis to France in 1856 – he lost much of the unerring diplomatic sense which had served him so well for so long, and though in his conflict with the Boers his power had been greatly reduced, he had succeeded in much that he sought to do. He had gathered the oppressed and the downtrodden about him, given them horses and arms for their defence, and moulded them into a nation. He had brought them the means of enlightenment and learning, and shown them the paths of security and peace. He had brought them a doctrine which, though Moshesh himself never formally accepted it, was the key that would give access to a better age. He had above all obtained from the Queen of England the protection needed to ensure the continuance of his work in times which he would find it increasingly difficult to understand.

Moshesh in the history of his people stands as the link between primitive and modern Africa. His life stretches back from the historic to the prehistoric. He stands at the dawn, behind him the night of tradition, before him the gathering light of new experience.



7. CAPE AND IMPERIAL

IN the year of Moshesh's death the course of South African history was transformed by the discovery of diamonds in the far west of the Orange Free State, at what became Kimberley. As humanity of all kinds scrambled up the sides of the tableland, and raced to make their fortunes in the diamond fields, Great Britain, by a piece of imperial sleight-of-hand, annexed the diamond area to Cape Colony, and instituted negotiations with Brand for the federation of the Cape and the Free State.

This latter action came to nothing at the time, but it was an indication of the future. One way or another, frontiers would move north again, and Basutoland would become an enclave with an administration entirely different from that around it, an anomaly, and to an administrative mind an untidy one. Basotho were flocking to the diamond fields to work as labourers, most of them handling money for the first time and learning its uses. Clearly Basutoland's future was inseparable from that of South Africa, and in the view of the Cape Governor, Sir Henry Barkly, who came to Maseru in 1871, the closer the relationship was made from the start, the simpler it would be for all concerned in the future. Having been given *carte blanche* by the British Government to decide how Basutoland should be administered, Barkly introduced legislation at Cape Town to make the territory the administrative responsibility of Cape Colony. The bill met with much opposition, but was finally passed. The following year the Cape was accorded responsible government, and Basutoland found herself being controlled not, as Moshesh had intended, by the Parliament at Westminster, but by that at Cape Town.

Joseph Orpen, a lifelong admirer and advocate of Moshesh, and who was at that time a Cape Member of Parliament, put Moshesh's successor Letsie (reigned 1870-91) up to petitioning for direct representation in the Cape legislature, but answer was given that in such a case Basutoland would have to become fully subject to colonial law. This among other things would mean that Europeans would have the right to own land in the territory,

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an eventuality which one of Moshesh's laws was expressly designed to prevent, and which Letsie and the other chiefs could never agree to. Thus as a colony of a colony Basutoland had her first experience of European rule.

The Cape Government showed that it had neither the experience nor the resources to deal successfully with the problems of exceptional difficulty which the country and its people presented, and which the Cape politicians became increasingly resentful of having been saddled with by Britain. On their side, the Basotho had scant confidence that the Cape Government would aid them against their Boer neighbours, from whom they expected further trouble. One of the main uses to which the Basotho, along with other Africans, put the money they earned at the diamond fields was the purchase of arms and ammunition, the country in the space of a few years becoming a veritable arsenal.

In 1878 the Cape Parliament passed a Peace Preservation Act, under which it was made illegal for non-Europeans to purchase or possess arms; all Africans owning arms were to surrender them to the authorities and receive compensation. The Act met with bitter African resentment, and in January 1879 the Zulu rose in revolt, wiping out an entire British battalion at Isandhlwana. News of this hardened Basotho determination to resist when their turn came to submit to disarmament, the upshot being the Gun War of 1880-81, in which the Basotho, under the leadership of their Paramount Chief's son Lerotholi (subsequently reigned 1891-1905), a worthy descendant of his grandfather Moshesh, were successful in forcing the Cape authorities to come to terms, the Basotho being permitted to retain their guns on payment of a licence fee. Though they also paid an indemnity of 5,000 head of cattle, there was no doubt on either side whose was the victory.

In 1883 the Cape Government sent a special representative to London in an endeavour to negotiate the transfer of Basutoland to the British Government, and on 18th March 1884 the imperial authorities formally assumed control. The administration of the territory was placed in the hands of a Resident Commissioner, Sir Marshall Clarke, responsible to the Governor of the Cape in his capacity as High Commissioner for South Africa. Where the Cape Government had sought to govern by a system of direct rule, the Imperial Government adopted and held to a policy of

indirect rule through chiefs, the outcome demonstrating the truth of Moshesh's words to Sir George Grey: 'If only you will rule my people through me there will be no trouble. They will follow me, and I will follow you.'

It was in a sense minimal government – interfering with the Basotho as little as possible – but in the circumstances of a largely primitive people, who were in addition very proud and very conservative, adapting themselves to a new way of life, it was the kind of government that was needed; and the first two Resident Commissioners, Clarke and Sir Godfrey Lagden, created an administration with a highly personal tone to it, which was what the Basotho liked, and which was based on intimate and friendly understanding of the people, their language and customs.

Yet Basutoland remained an anomaly. The London authorities were scarcely more enthusiastic about it than the Cape authorities had been. When in 1886 gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand, and Basotho streamed off in their hundreds to work in the mines, the inevitability of Basutoland at some future date becoming united with the country around it seemed irresistible. Even more did it appear so when, in 1902, after the South African War (during which the Basotho remained steadfastly loyal to the British) the Boer republics were extinguished, and the red ran far up the map, leaving Basutoland a small pink dot in the middle.

In 1908 began the discussions which two years later led to the creation of the independent Union of South Africa, and Basutoland faced the prospect of, for the second time, coming under the jurisdiction of Cape Town, this time with Pretoria thrown in. The Whitehall bureaucrats too had thought of this tidy arrangement. With raised eyebrows they learned that a deputation was on its way from Basutoland to insist that the little country remain under direct British control. The bureaucrats shrugged their shoulders. It simply did not make sense, but in 1910, when the Union of South Africa was formed, Basutoland remained a British colony.

Bureaucrats retired and were replaced by others with similarly tidy minds. Each in their turn looked at the small pink spot and thought the same: its ultimate merger with South Africa, in the right circumstances and possibly under special conditions, was

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inescapable. South Africans were recruited to serve among Basutoland's civil servants, a measure which the shrewder Basotho understood and cared little for. Minimal government continued, but now for other reasons. With excellent and widespread primary education available, Basutoland had by this time the highest literacy rate in Africa. It was surrounded by a country with inherited British traditions. It needed no great stretch of imagination to envisage a situation occurring, tomorrow or the day after, when a change of circumstances would enable Britain to shed her responsibilities, leaving the real work of development in Basutoland to rich and prosperous South Africa with her gold and diamonds, a government on the spot, and one which would be prepared to spend far more on the country than could be painfully squeezed yearly out of the British Treasury.

These illusions, not held by all, yet strong enough to dictate overall policy, were finally shattered in 1948, when the Nationalist Party of Dr. D. F. Malan won the South African elections with *apartheid* as a main item of policy. For Basutoland, merger with such a South Africa was clearly out of the question. From 1948, and in increased measure as subsequent South African elections confirmed the strength of the Nationalists, Britain squarely faced the fact that responsibility for Basutoland's development was hers. The scope and tempo of government increased – at last, some would be inclined to say.

8. OVER THE BORDER

BEING uninitiated, I reached the Basutoland frontier with a passportless driver, who on the South African side left my luggage in the dusty road, turned his car about, and with a polite 'Well, cheerio!' left me in the sunny stillness of a late winter afternoon. There was no one to carry the luggage any further, no transport, nothing.

Entrusting my belongings to the South African Police officer on duty, I walked across the bridge. I had been in Africa 24 hours, my first visit. At Johannesburg, being driven to the airport at the first light, I had seen long files of shabbily dressed Africans walking miles and miles to work. In Bloemfontein I had seen depressed groups of African women, most of them looking down-trodden, wandering aimlessly about, avoiding, as it seemed to me, the eyes of any white they came near. Travelling through the country in a fast limousine, I had seen here and there decrepit villages, the houses with mud walls and tin roofs held in position by stones round the rim, places of drab hopelessness, almost as grim and forgotten as Arab villages in the arid depths of Iraq. Mahatma Gandhi's soul-searing description of his own people when he returned from South Africa to India – 'a people helpless and inert' – had been on my mind since early morning.

I was ready for the reception I would receive at the Basutoland frontier post – an inert reception, which experience forewarned me would mean an examination of passport and baggage taking three times the normal length of time, while lifeless eyes searched for they knew not what, ferreting amid handkerchiefs and socks for some clue to refusing permission to enter, permission being the unfaceable problem of the inert.

Adjusting myself to a moody interview, I entered the silent frontier post, a modest hut, and placed my passport on the desk before an emotionless African in a police uniform. In keeping with frontier posts the world over, life continued as usual while the African completed what he was doing. Then, without looking at me, he took the passport away into an inner room.

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I felt my temperature rising. Concentrating on those countries where a weekend visit consumes three whole pages of a passport with chops and weird emblems – in Burma once on a weekend visit I had to register as an immigrant – I pursed my lips and sought to muster self-control. Just when, I thought, will the moment come when I shall rap this desk, and demand that I not be treated as a criminal?

There followed a shock. Not that anything occurred terrestrially; Africa on this latitude does not suffer from earthquakes. But an African officer appeared, a big round man with a moon face and numerous stars on his shoulder-straps, indeed a portent, a swift-moving comet in the otherwise complacent sky.

‘What are you doing here?’ he demanded.

I said I was a visitor.

‘What is the purpose of your visit?’ His eyes were as big as a Bengali’s, but more fierce.

Very tight-lipped, I thought he had better have it.

‘I have been asked to write a book on Basutoland’, I said with measured formality.

As I should have realized, this had the worst possible effect. Every piece of brass on him shivered with hostility.

‘Have you ever been here before?’ he inquired.

‘No.’

‘Then how are you going to write a book?’ he thundered with the finality of a Q.E.D.

‘That is, as you have said, just the problem,’ I answered, whereupon the officer burst into a peal of laughter, so shaking him that his buttons and pips twinkled like stars (their glorious light had till then been motionless, like the light of planets) my passport was thrust back into my hand, while with his other huge round fist the officer picked up a telephone.

‘There’s a man here who’s come to write a book!’ he extolled to some unknown body, and really roared with laughter till the hut vibrated and all the constables were shivering with laughter – in sympathetic vibration, as it were.

As an African reaction to literature it may have lacked tone, but – ye gods! – what an astounding difference from the country I had just left!

* * *

While waiting for someone to come and meet me with a car I

had an interesting discussion with a well-spoken African doing some gardening in the frontier post compound. Bright-eyed and intelligent, he was wearing a smart red and white striped jumper which went well with his dark skin. He was complaining that South Africa's latest policy in regard to migrant labour was having an adverse effect on the number of Basotho accepted each year at the gold mines.

When the African official sent to meet me with a car arrived, he eyed me somewhat strangely. We crossed to South Africa, collected my baggage, checked ourselves into Basutoland, and drove towards Maseru through an avenue of trees rising like sentinels of civilization in the barren but majestic landscape. Only after a mile did my new companion, a very guarded civil servant, very much *à l'anglaise*, venture a cautious look askance from the steering wheel.

'How did you come to be talking to that man?' he inquired.

'That man?' – I sensed a certain accusation in the voice.

'What's wrong with that? He was very intelligent.'

'Was he?'

Silence.

I sought some means of justifying myself.

'He was wearing a very fetching pullover.'

Lunga pausa, then –

'There's something you should know.'

'Yes?'

Another painful pause.

'Yes. That pullover. It's a convict's uniform.'

But what a civil servant! He said it without batting an eyelid.

'Nevertheless,' I insisted, 'he was intelligent.'

This produced a smile of satisfaction. Convict or not, the man was a Mosotho.

My luggage, incidentally, had not even been examined.

* * *

It is a Hindu belief that people should be judged at the instant of first encounter. My own first encounters with Basotho people produced the ineffaceable impression of a race for whom freedom and self-reliance are cardinal to existence; and particularly as I had expected to find the reverse, it compelled attention to the highly unusual nature of the country's status as a British colony: that this was a country neither conquered nor exploited, but one

to which colonialism had come as a means of safeguarding the people's cherished freedom, the handiwork of Moshesh. Here was something I had never seen before – colonialism by invitation. In these strange circumstances the worst feature of alien rule, which is that it imperceptibly saps the will to freedom, was absent. The Union flag might fly before the modest single-storey Secretariat with its ponderous Edwardian rustication, but this did not signify that the people had lost their freedom. As the crucial first encounter showed, here was that contradiction in terms – a colony with freedom in its soul.

Maseru turned out to be a small dusty country town. As we drove in, the sun was setting behind us, orange-gold and significant in a sky of misty blue. Along the sand-strewn edges of the main street horsemen trotted proudly past on well-groomed sturdy ponies, a distinctive breed owing its origin to Moshesh's plundering of the Griquas and Bastards. The Basotho horsemen epitomize the country's sense of freedom; few countries surely have a prouder sight which is yet so commonplace, so integrated into daily life that only a visitor would remark on it.

Having seen pictures of Basotho horsemen in their multi-coloured blankets and distinctive straw hats, I had imagined this national costume to be, as in many other countries, a form of fancy dress worn on special occasions. It was a surprise to find it being so generally worn. The blanket is of course the Basotho overcoat, worn over a usually nondescript collection of European clothes about which no one bothers much. One sees no such refinements, for example, as riding breeches. A pair of old khaki slacks will be considered quite good enough for the most splendid-looking rider.

The choice of a blanket, on the other hand, is a serious matter, to which both men and women give prolonged attention. When two Basotho meet to find they are wearing blankets of identical pattern the situation is not quite so grave as in the case of two European ladies meeting in identical evening dresses, but it lies in that direction. A Mosotho beau takes care to select a pattern he has seen no one wearing before, creating a situation in which the harassed blanket factories (most of them situated in South Africa) are obliged to produce an astonishing variety of designs, which tend to become more and more *outré*. This meets the need exactly, and makes any Basutoland street scene a riot of lively

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and unusual colours, in which pale blues, greens, pinks, and purples predominate, the blanket designs being in wavy patterns combining colours which in Europe would render them unsaleable, but which perfectly suit the pigment of African skin, as well as contributing to the subtle harmony of the colour schemes with which the Basotho delight in surrounding themselves in their own land.



Women, I saw in these first brief glimpses, were also wearing blankets, using them similarly as an overcoat over a simple skirt and jumper of European style. Some of them, like the horsemen, wore the typical Basotho hat, with its curious top-knot looking like a corkscrew. Other women had simply a coloured kerchief tied about their hair. As among Arabs of the desert, one was conscious of these people's need to keep the swirling dust of a dry winter out of their hair. African friends in fact later explained to me that no kind of hair is worse than their own for gathering dust, and one of everyone's first actions in the morning is to wash their hair.

Women did not ride horses, I observed, but there were quite a

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number of them on bicycles. Before the sun sank away, it was the horseman in his pale blue and pink blanket, draped about him with the majesty of an emperor's cloak, his conical hat set at a rakish angle, his cheerful cries to this person and that as he trotted down a road leading into the darkening countryside, that made the clearest impression. It was a sight which, wordless and in the flicker of a second, explained what I had been unable to glimpse when, in London prior to departure, I had pored over a map of southern Africa. There was a reason for Basutoland's separate existence.

When the rider departed in a film of dust, the sun had already set, and in a few moments it was night.

* * *

Night in winter of itself creates the atmosphere of Basutoland. At 5,100 feet above sea level, Maseru is one of the lowest points in the country, only a few hundred feet higher than Bloemfontein; yet, possibly due to the closeness of the mountains, Maseru is markedly colder at night, and for this reason conveys to a newcomer the impression of being raised high above and apart, an enclosed mountain world with a life different from that of the plains – the impression most typified by Nepal to one arriving from the plains of India. Perhaps the knowledge, too, that just down the road there is a frontier adds to the atmosphere. Clustering with others round a huge log fire at the inn, one feels comfortably enclosed in a little world unglimped by those who dwell beyond – ‘outside’ – among the moon-mountains, while Johannesburg and its gold mines seem ten thousand miles away. As the temperature sinks far below freezing, as the fire burns, and outside there is stillness and a sky glittering with stars, one perceives that Basutoland is indeed what the map proclaims it to be, an asylum of difference where things revolve according to their own measure, as the moon does, refusing obedience to the sun.

At the bar of the inn – the clientele that evening was 75 per cent African – some of the features of this small, enclosed world began to appear. After twenty years in Asia it was a surprise to me to find what a high percentage of people spoke English, and good colloquial English too. The voices were interesting as well, deep and vibrant, with a strong musical timbre. But as an hour at the bar, and conversations in various groups, showed, apart from a lawyer, an urbanized chief, and a political hench-

man, every African in the room owed his livelihood in one way or another to the government. A bar dominated by civil servants is in any part of the world an unusual occurrence, and it registered a point. Basutoland was a country with no industries and very little commerce.

That evening I dined at the home of an African senior civil servant and his engaging and animated wife, who was a prominent social worker. Their house was yet another surprise to one whose contacts with people of other races have been made in Asia. Apart from the gauze coverings over windows and doors to keep out flies in summer, the interior of the house might have been a simple middle-class home in England. A sofa and deep armchairs encircled a brightly burning fire. A large and handsome record-player was stacked with a pile of pop discs. Watercolours and calendar prints hung framed on the walls; a cactus sprouted from a heavy green pot on a small square table covered with a patterned lace cloth. There were antimacassars, a brass poker, and well-polished fire-tongs, and along the mantelpiece silver-framed photographs of marriages and other family gatherings. Dinner was served buffet-style at a table in another room, whence we returned with our plates, and ate with forks, seated round the fire, balancing our plates on our laps.

Similar experiences in Asia – European-style dinners served in houses owing nothing to the culture of the country – are more often than not the mark of the mental escapist, or of those ‘advisers’ of imperial days who were a little too good to be true. Looking round on this first evening in Basutoland, and finding that the only evidence of Africa in the house were the faces of my host and hostess, one of the great paradoxes of southern Africa quietly asserted itself. The culture behind African nationalism is European. The only alternative to a European house is a windowless mud-hut so full of smoke that it makes your eyes water if you stand up; to escape the smoke you must either squat or sit. The only alternative to a well-cooked European meal (which was what my hostess, an expert cook and a teacher of cooking in Women’s Institutes, had munificently provided) is a traditional African repast containing little that is nourishing.

Here it was not a question – as it was, for example, in Burma or Malaya – of choosing between two highly evolved and comfortable cultures in the matter of dress, the kind of house lived in,

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or the type of food served. In Basutoland these hospitable people, leaders in their own society, faced a more clear-cut and far more fundamental problem. They had no choice. They had to pass from one way of living to another, completely, in everything concerning their lives; and this not because anyone had so decreed it in London or anywhere else, but because they themselves knew there was no other way for furthering their own and their people's advance. Behind them lay the mud-hut, the tribal doctor, the medicine giving power to your shadow. You could have it if you wanted, of course, but it did not lead anywhere. If you were to break from this timeless antiquity, and find a life of progress and hope, the only remedy so far suggested was the creation of a semblance of European life in an African society.

From their home and the proceedings of the evening's entertainment, it could be seen that my host and hostess, and their entire family, had made this great transposition; and by the animated way in which my hostess described her work in the villages, teaching women to plant vegetables and explaining how to cook them, striving to bring more nourishment into their daily diet, one saw that the transposition from traditional African to a form of European life was one destined to be extended throughout society.

I looked round at the homely English room. A log of fresh-cut wood spat in the grate; on a nearby dresser a sturdy clock chimed the hour to the tune of Big Ben. My hostess was explaining how village women had to learn to master their fear of eating eggs (believing that these rendered them incapable of bearing children); her husband nodded, agreeing with what she said. They were absorbed, each of them, in their jobs, obviously convinced of the importance and usefulness of what they were doing. But comparing them with Burmese or Malays, who might become westernized, but who had a vital culture of their own on which to build their westernization, the loneliness of these two Africans – a social loneliness – seemed to me to be terrifying.

9. FIRST WEEK

AS soon as I possibly could after arrival, I made arrangements to be driven out of Maseru to the place I wished to visit above all others – Thaba Bosiu, the fortress of Moshesh. It was a glorious blue winter day, warm in the sun, cold in shadow, and we escaped from the houses of the little town to find the bare landscape with its solemn flat-topped mountains revealed in all its majesty. Early morning sunlight gave the austere sandstone rims of the mountains subtle tints of pink and pale mauve, colours to which patches of fine pink grass growing on the steeper slopes contributed. Though a dry and obdurate scene, there was nothing harsh or sullen brown about it; it vibrated with colours too delicate for the eye to distinguish with exactitude, and which mysteriously altered as the hour advanced, causing it to seem as if the mountains were changing their shapes all the time, sometimes drawing closer to us, at other times receding, and always, it occurred to me, smiling at our inability to define the metamorphoses they gently presented for our delectation.

My initial impression, driving in from the frontier, of the trees as sentinels of civilization, was strangely confirmed. The instant we left Maseru, we left trees behind. In fact, so bare was the immense landscape that even a single tree stood out across miles and miles of African distance as a portent, a beckoning sign, while a grove, on the rare occasions when we saw one, lay upon the mauve breadth of the earth like a luxuriant, fertile square, a section from a chessboard which its maker had never been able to complete.

‘What are those trees?’ I asked when we spied the first grove.

‘That’s a British trader’s store’, my African companion answered.

‘And those?’ I said when we drew near the second grove.

‘That’s the home of a retired Mosotho teacher.’

‘And that grove over there?’

‘That’s a Catholic school.’

Nor did one have to look far for an explanation of the bareness

of the land. In whatever direction one chose to look were herds of cattle, flocks of sheep and goats, immense numbers of them, far too many for this sorry earth to support, wandering where they would in the charge of ragged small boys who waved to us gaily and proudly as we passed.

Doubtless they were proud of the great numbers of livestock they commanded, for in Basutoland to drive a herd is like marching possessively behind a procession of banknotes. Yet many of the cattle were wretched creatures, their bones casting gaunt shadows down their flanks; and they moved across the almost grassless earth with a kind of desperation, their noses low as they searched for the least morsel to eat.

This added to the subtle movement which the changes of colour on the mountains created over the vast scene. Where in a rich country a herd of cattle remains for hours in one place, these herds were constantly moving, until as one became accustomed to the details in each of the tremendous, lonely views our drive presented, one observed that nothing remained the same for more than a few minutes. Majestic and benevolent the appearance of the mountains might be, but across the broad valleys they distantly enclosed there ran in silence the crazed movements of an unending struggle against hunger and death.

That the land was being made to support far too many cattle was not the only problem, moreover. Aggravating it there was the fact that, apart from around the three groves of trees we observed in a 17-mile journey of colossal visual distances, there was not a single fence. All that the eye could see had been abandoned to the struggle for survival. The Egyptians had broken into Joseph's stores, and they were stores no more. Despairing life scoured the land to its uttermost ends, dying on the way without understanding that this was the retribution for having unlocked the forbidden granary.

'How I wish you could see this in summer, when it's all green!' my companion remarked with feeling.

'It must be wonderful,' I said.

We passed a horse stumbling helpless down a gentle hill, its eyes dazed with hunger, having no idea where it was going, its forefeet crossing over one another as it moved, the left foot going to the right, the right to the left, the mark of death. It was nearing the road as we passed, and our car enveloped it in a huge cloud

FIRST WEEK

of dust. I looked back, but could see nothing. Perhaps it died then and there. In any case it would be dead before sundown.

'In summer it really is wonderful,' my companion echoed, not noticing the horse. 'Everything, literally everything, is green.' No doubt, I found myself thinking. But Joseph would not have let them devour it.

* * *

Soil erosion, I had been told, was one of Basutoland's gravest problems. Being accustomed to erosion as it is in South China, where it creates vivid yellow scars on an otherwise green hill, and can be remedied by tree-planting and fencing (and guards to prevent the depredations of grass-cutters), I had been looking for similar signs in the splendid African landscape, and had seen none.

'No erosion problem here, I take it,' I said after some time. My companion looked aghast.

'Erosion? But it's everywhere! Can't you see?'

'No, I'm afraid not.'

Fearing I had been marked down as an ignoramus, I said no more, but a few moments later we drew up at nowhere in particular, and I was invited to get out.

It was wide open country, with unseeded fields rising gently toward the severe sandstone rim (glowing pink) of one of the innumerable flat-topped mountains, and my companion indicated that I should follow him as he walked up the hill, away from the road.

Instead of taking me upward to inspect a view (as I imagined must be his purpose), he led me into a curious ravine between two of the rising fields. Once inside it, the earth of the fields rose up on either side of us to a height of some 12 feet, leaving us in what seemed like a cave of stalagmites with the roof taken off. As if carved by hand, the earth came down sharp from the fields above in bunched pilasters resembling the lower portions of a great fluted arch in a gothic cathedral.

'This is erosion.'

Looking back out of the strangely enclosed privacy of this low rift between the fields, toward the grandeur of the view we had entirely left behind, I realized my mistake. I had been attempting to identify erosion in terms of colour, yellow against green. Here

there was no question of this. The earth simply caved in as it was, and was borne away by rain down one of these weird corridors, almost subterranean, coursing between the fields like dry river-beds formed by artifice in a world of Dantesque nightmare.

It was horrifyingly simple. Give it a chance, and the earth just slid away, leaving a 12-foot deep gash through what had once been one field, but which was thus divided into two, thereby doubling the difficulty of ploughing, while with every fall of rain the gash widened, as pilaster and stalagmite collapsed into the flow, till the flow was master and the fields useless.

I could not understand on this first encounter how the erosion had started, or why it had started where it had. Later, when I had observed more of it, and been further instructed in its mysteries, my problem changed. How was I to explain this strange process of nature to someone who had not seen it?

Then one day, high up on a mountainside beneath the typical giant over-hanging rim of sandstone, surrounding the flat crest of the moon-mountain and preventing our access to it, I put out a finger and gently rubbed the rock, which had a pleasant-looking surface. To my surprise, no sooner did my finger touch it than fragments of fine powder began to drop in a dry, yellow cascade down to the earth at my feet.

It was the clue to understanding. This magnificent, mighty-seeming landscape, in guise imperious, in vista infinite, was in reality nothing more than a counterfeit created out of powder – solidified powder in the rock-lined hills, looser powder in the fields, and loosest powder of all in the little streams and rivers, which after a shower of rain turned bright brown, sweeping away the deceiving majesty of Basutoland, swirling it off down the Orange River, across the heart of southern Africa, bearing to the South Atlantic Ocean tidings of this fraud at the summit of a subcontinent.

As the fine shaft of powder fell beneath my finger's movement, I looked again at the gigantic view encompassing me in the unique manner of southern Africa, and had a quiet laugh. It had certainly deceived me, with its noble appearances of solidity. What actress, I thought, ever devised a more convincing *maquillage*? Even knowing the secret, one could still scarcely believe it. After all, the rocks *looked* like rocks, *were* rocks, and the earth beneath my footfall *felt* and *was* completely solid.

Wise is the fool who sees but does not know! Sad is he who knows, for he knows himself fooled!

* * *

This, then, is the story of erosion, and of Basutoland. It is a land of powder. And how erosion begins is a fantasy.

A stone no larger than a cricket ball can start it. A stone lying, let us say, on a gentle slope. If the summer rains were less violent (which if there were a great many more trees they probably might be) the stone would be less of a danger. As things are, any stone lying about is a potential threat. The rain, as we noted earlier, comes in short showers of great ferocity. It smacks down on the dry earth, which absorbs only a little of it, most of the water racing downhill where it can, till it finds a stream which its arrival converts into a flow of brown powder.

But the rain has smacked so hard around our stone the size of a cricket ball that it has created a dent in the earth beside it, and as shower follows shower, this dent deepens. The stone then finds itself perched on a small pillar of earth, while the dent extends itself downhill, and becomes a steadily deepening watercourse. When the pillar on which the stone rests is about a foot high, the earth can no longer support it, and the stone falls into the trough it has created, where at a lower level the same process is repeated, each summer shower deepening the watercourse, till a great gash is created through the fields, such as the gash in which I had been invited to stand, and from which only the sky was visible.

I have taken the extreme case of the stone because it best illustrates the difficulty of agriculture in Basutoland. In fact the worst erosion is caused by cattle tracks – by anything, in other words, which lowers the common earth level, and provides the violent rains of summer with a course down which to run, sweeping away the precious earth with it.

As my eye became accustomed to this strange process of erosion, I observed that the landscape, wherever one looked, was riddled with these stark gashes of destruction. A people with highly evolved farming traditions and methods – the Chinese, for example – could doubtless have coped with the problem. But it took no more than a glance at the fields to appreciate that the Basotho had no such evolved techniques. As a result, they were not the masters of their own precarious, powdery soil. They were its victims.

Another important item fell into place. Though the people we passed looked lively, and the children at a village shop we called at had good clear skins, this was a country with very little to eat. In fact, it was no surprise to learn later that the five principal diseases dealt with in the hospitals – these diseases include pella-gra, kwashiorkor, and tuberculosis – were all due to malnutrition.

‘There’s Thaba Bosiu’, my companion said as we headed into another immense view.

But it was impossible to determine which of the various flat-topped mountains he was indicating.

‘Which one?’ I inquired.

‘That one – the one with the tree.’

Indeed, on the top of one of the hills was a single tree, visible for miles. It looked so imposing that it was quite a disappointment, when we climbed to the top of the natural fortress, to find the tree was only a poor stunted specimen. But such is the significance of a tree in that land.

We left the car at the foot of the mountain, beside a new Protestant church. The former church, a wooden one, I was informed, blew away. I thought at first I must have misheard my companion, but no, this was how it was. A whirlwind sucked the entire church up into the sky, and it was never seen again. A Sunday service was being held at the time, and the surprised congregation, clad in their best clothes, suddenly found themselves wall-less and roofless, still seated on their benches, but now communing with nature.

Beside the road a plain stone recorded the coming of the three French missionaries. It is sometimes said the stone marks the spot where Moshesh and the missionaries met; but as Eugène Casalis’ account quoted earlier suggests, this would seem to be incorrect. The meeting took place on the mountain-top. The stone may perhaps mark the spot where they dismounted from their horses.

As so often happened to Moshesh’s adversaries in the past, we missed the subtly concealed point of access to the mountain, and thus found ourselves beneath the great rib of stone by which it is rimmed, and in a good position to appreciate the insuperable obstacle it presented to an invader.

The mountain-top is deserted today. Thaba Bosiu has accomplished its historic purpose, and sleeps now as it slept for a million years before Moshesh led his people to it. Yet the spirit of those

great times still breathes over the rough grass, and to scan the miles and miles of pink and mauve distance, the plains and severe flat mountains of the lowlands, the darker basalt of the Maluti highlands, their tops crested with snow, is to experience in retrospect something of what Moshesh must himself have felt as once he too surveyed this African magnificence, and posted his men to watch some minutely moving object in the plain – a Boer commando perhaps, or Adam Krotz bringing the missionaries he had promised.

The ruins of Moshesh's stone house remain, not far from the small, significant tree. One of the first rectangular buildings ever erected in Basutoland, the positioning of the stones shows that it was built either by Constant Gosselin or one of his pupils.

Not far from these and other ruins of what was once Moshesh's court are the tombs of the family of the Paramount Chiefs of Basutoland, rough piles of stone, amid which here and there grass appears, mounds unnamed, the simplest form of tomb, the forlorn sight of which is a reminder of what Africa is, and from how far in time and skill it has to come in its transposition from the old to the new.

Even Moshesh's tomb bears no name – in his day the anonymity of a grave was regarded as a protection against sorcery – but it is distinguished from the others in being surrounded by some old pieces of iron railing, some of them standing askew, linked by a chain. I had not expected a noble monument, yet somehow the rough cluster of stones that I found was one of the saddest sights I have ever seen. Some weeks earlier Moshesh's anniversary had been observed, and on the pile of stones was a posy of imitation poppies and red roses. The remains of a piece of red silk dangled dejectedly from it, bearing in gold the words 'IN MEMORIAM'.

One of the few tombs to bear a name is that of Paramount Chief Letsie, the name carved so thinly that a little moss and a little more rain will wear it quite away. Observing it reminded me of seeing a house being built in Maseru, and finding that all the skilled work was being done by Portuguese bricklayers and masons, the Africans on the site being used only to carry things. The carving of Letsie's name now presented another fact. A country of few manual skills.

Returning from Thaba Bosiu, we stopped at a village, where I found further evidence of what had struck me from the moment

of arrival – the people's remarkable colour-sense and love of colour. The rondaavels, well spaced over a mounting hill, were sturdy and well-built, their walls coated with a layer of carefully selected mud giving off a glowing earth-red hue, the doors painted green, blue, yellow or red, visible, as I later observed, for miles in the dry landscape, tiny vivid dots of colour on a vast parchment.

The thatching of the Basotho, which is said to be the finest in Africa, was of a quality I had never seen before. The roofs of the rondaavels were so exquisitely thatched that they literally shimmered golden in the sunlight, a gold that shone in varying shades as one passed, and as the angle of the sun caught it in different lights.

Another village art associated with this, and equally impressive, is the making of huge storage vessels woven entirely from thickly plaited grass, and, incredible as it seemed to me, completely watertight. The village, and indeed every village I subsequently saw, was certainly an amazing change from the drab, tin-roofed settlements I had passed on my way through the Orange Free State. Here was other evidence of a proud freedom.

To keep cows and other animals away from vegetable patches, there were low hedges of Mexican agave, their spiked blue-green leaves contrasting with the earth-red of the rondaavels and the golden thatch to produce a colour scheme which can surely be seen nowhere else in the world, and which, in memory now, evokes Basutoland more completely than anything else can. Adding to memory the details of a bright yellow or pale blue doorway, these colours create Africa amid the birdless silence of the veld. One almost turns in the expectation of seeing again the flat-topped mountains, austere and watchful, the immensities of blue distance, the serene and splendid continent which has waited so long for men and women with their arts to adorn it.

* * *

Colour and elegance are for me the two visual distinguishing marks of the Basotho. A Mosotho horseman wears his blanket as even Napoleon might have failed to, but it is not just that. His choice of colour in the selection of a blanket is impeccable, based on the colour of his skin, which in the Basotho varies considerably, from a golden brown almost as fair as that of a Malay, to

the depth-of-night darkness of a South Indian. The fairer-skinned will choose the earth colours, more subdued and giving strength of light to the face. The dark-skinned, needing light, can afford to be more abandoned with their pale blues and pinks.

Among women this colour-sense has produced one of the rare instances in which the women of a race adopting European clothes for the first time have done so with the same unerring dress sense that marked the selection of their traditional costumes.

Basotho ladies pride themselves on the fact that they never use make-up. They in other words look at themselves frankly in a mirror, assess the colour of their skin, and from this point of departure start their clothing operations.

How well they succeed by this method I saw on my first Sunday, when I attended morning service at the Church of Basutoland in Maseru. I feel sure I must be right in calling this one of the most astonishing civilized experiences which Africa can offer. *Haute couture* apart, the moment when, in the packed and extremely modern Greek-cross church, the cantor quietly sounds a note, shakes his hands to give the rhythm, and 800 voices ring out in perfect four-part harmony, is electrifying and profoundly moving. I must confess that, holding a hymnbook in sol-fa, which I cannot read, I found myself silent amid a sound of glory, tears pouring down my cheeks.

Once recovered from this impact, and unable to understand more than a chance word in the Sesotho service, I fell inevitably to contemplating the congregation. The men dressed in the sober uniformity of dark suits, it was the women who claimed my attention; for this, I saw, was not only the worship of God, it was a fashion-show organized as God would surely wish it. It would have been hard to imagine any large gathering of women dressed with more collectively unostentatious good taste. In every society we are familiar with the pretty woman who wears the wrong clothes. I have come to the conclusion that she is unknown in Basutoland. With memories of other lands, I searched for her unconsciously along the rows of handsome African women, their skins glowing above well-chosen colours, and was disconcerted not to find a single one. And the hats! – so simple and restrained, looking as if they had landed there by accident in the perfect position of smartness, gloves and handbag completing the colour scheme.

'Hair-dos', incidentally, are as important and complicated as in Europe. It is time for Jeannette to have her hair done, says Mother. One looks at Jeannette, who looks all right, and innocently wonders why. Jeannette knows it is true, however, and off she goes to a long ordeal of plaiting the tiny mound-like tufts with which an African head is endowed. When she comes back you can see what Mother meant, but you still wonder why she bothered. Jeannette looks all right. (Africans are equally mystified by European 'hair-dos'.) To attend church, of course, one does not have to be so grandly attired. There were plenty of women in blankets with well-chosen scarves over their heads. But the operative element of choice in clothes, it seemed to me, was the same – faultless.

By the end of a week in Maseru the pieces in the puzzle were, I felt, beginning to fall into shape. Here was a freedom-loving, self-reliant people of intelligence and considerable charm, hospitable and able to entertain a European visitor in genuine and unselfconsciously European style. The urban society they formed, in which the Churches and choral singing played an important part, strove to create a kind of English society in an African setting, not as a result of outside compulsion, but because there seemed to be no sensible alternative.

But it was a little world of numerous insecurities, partly because it was surrounded by South Africa, which had different ideas about society, and partly because the basic agricultural and mineral poverty of the country seriously restricted the activities within society. There were no industries and very little commerce. For an educated young man from one of the best schools there was little choice but to become a civil servant or a teacher, or go back to the land as a 'gentleman farmer', an occupation in which it seemed doubtful that there could be much reward until the practice of enclosing land by fences could be introduced. It was a land of few manual skills. The earth was an agriculturalist's nightmare, tilled by people without evolved farming techniques, and for the majority of the population there was thus not enough to eat, with the inevitable consequence of a low resistance to disease.

The urban society I found myself in was clearly determined to improve matters throughout the country, but patently every problem affecting civilized society in Basutoland – the society of

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that country's future – had its roots in the plains and mountains beyond Maseru. There, in the villages, among the flocks and herds, dwelt the majority of the Basotho people, amongst whom education was bringing steady changes, but who still clung to tribal traditions from which the educated people of the towns had largely freed themselves.

It was time to part company for the moment with the lively, well-spoken men and forthright, challenging ladies who had made me so welcome in Maseru, and move out into the country – and into some of the problems.



10. VITAL STATISTICS AND VITAL PROBLEMS

BASUTOLAND has only two significant external sources of income – the sale of wool, mohair, hides and skins; and the remittances received from men working in South Africa, many of them in the mines. In a good year Basutoland's wool exports fetch over £800,000, mohair around £350,000. The export value of hides and skins is harder to determine, but it is a sizeable and growing source of income.

The census of 1956 gave a total African population of 793,639, of whom 154,782 were absent from the country, the great majority of these being men working in South Africa. An agricultural census conducted in 1960 gave an African population of 888,000, including absentees. It is probable that about half the adult male population is working in the Republic at any one time, and the money they earn there is vital to Basutoland's economy. At the gold mines alone Basotho earn approximately £4 million a year, of which a substantial percentage makes its way back to Basutoland in the form of remittances, deferred payments, and in goods. Fifty-four thousand, nine hundred Basotho were recruited for the mines in 1962, 48,300 in 1963. In 1963 the average monthly strength of Basotho in the gold mines alone was 52,200, roughly 25 per cent of Basutoland's labour force.

While minimal government continued, these sources of income were sufficient to enable the Basutoland administration to raise enough revenue to make a balanced budget. Sources of government revenue included direct taxation, licences and fees, an export duty on wool and mohair, a posts and telegraph service which made a modest profit, and – the largest single item – an annual share of 0.88575 per cent of South Africa's customs revenue, the fruit of a convenient arrangement whereby South African dutiable products enter Basutoland freely.

In 1948, for reasons already explained, it became apparent that minimal government must be replaced by something more thorough and energetic. It was some years before the effects were

felt of Britain's more determined policy in respect of Basutoland's retarded development, but when they were, it was quickly perceived that, even with assistance from Colonial Development and Welfare funds, the Basutoland economy could not stand the strain. Development itself, though it brings about improvements, breeds expense. In 1957 the country failed to balance its budget – only by a small margin, but a margin that annually increased, and could not be arrested without bringing development to a standstill – and in 1960 Britain and Basutoland faced the fact that the latter must become a grant-aided country, which it has remained ever since.

The following year, when the development programme moved into full swing, with an impressive more-than-doubling of expenditure on education and public works, and with other increases all round, the grant required to cover Basutoland's budget deficit shot up from £450,000 to £1,200,000, and by 1964 had climbed to just under £1,700,000. In the same year Basutoland found herself with an estimated territorial revenue of £2,479,343 (with the contribution from South African customs still the largest single item), and faced with an estimated expenditure of £4,169,680. Furthermore a change in the customs agreement whereby a fixed percentage is paid to Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland was imminent, and this, which would give Swaziland a fairer share, was certain to mean a severe reduction in Basutoland's share, putting the country even more in the red.

These were the financial circumstances in which, in the same year, Britain agreed to the introduction of a new constitution for Basutoland, making the country virtually self-governing.

With these facts and figures in mind, let us now take a look in greater depth at the landscape which we have already glanced at superficially.

Even from the little we have seen, it will have been apparent to the discerning that the poverty of the land, its treeless, fenceless appearance, was not due solely to ignorance. As always in anything to do with land, there are questions of tradition to be considered as well. Basutoland in the country, in fact – as one comes to realize after a few weeks – presents a series of conflicts between ancient traditions and modern needs, concerning which one hesitates to use the word irreconcilable, but which com-

positely offer some of the knottiest problems to be encountered anywhere in the world.

Basutoland has no industries, and her mineral resources have not so far proved to amount to much. The future of the country depends overwhelmingly on agriculture and stockraising, two occupations in which tradition is deeply entrenched.

Since the days when the Basotho were moving as lonely as a ship in the heart of Africa, their knowledge of agriculture has improved somewhat, but social traditions in respect of agriculture have altered profoundly. During the long period of incessant warfare from 1822 to 1868, which only came to a real end in 1884, men had to be in a constant state of preparedness to fight. Agriculture had never been a popular occupation among men – the herds had always interested them more than the fields – though they had done their share willingly enough with the women and children. The outcome of prolonged warfare was that the work of the fields was left more and more to women.

The end of warring coincided with the discovery of South Africa's gold and diamonds, and an urgent demand for African labour to work the mines. Instead of returning to their neglected fields, those who had formerly been soldiers of their chief sought a new life of adventure in Kimberley and Johannesburg, their sons emulating their fathers' example. The tradition grew that agriculture was not a man's work.

Education came, and a new lettered class arose. But it was not rural education, it was academic. The goal it offered was socially well-to-do life in a town, advantages which the Africans I had met in Maseru – and in many cases their parents and grandparents as well – had taken.

Education had thus done little to help agriculture, which among the literate is now and for many years has been classed as an occupation for those who have failed to pass their examinations, while because the towns offer few opportunities, many who have had a certain education are driven back to the villages, where they consider it beneath their dignity to do farm work. Meanwhile women work the fields aided by such of the men as can be persuaded to help them, which often means the less intelligent and those who have little interest in farming.

The present division of agricultural labour runs approximately thus. Men do the ploughing, women the hoeing and

weeding – if they have time, which they often do not. Women select the seed, and men sow it – possibly because men are thought to possess more vital force than women, and the crop will grow better. Women do the threshing and harvesting; men carry in the crop – on the backs of donkeys. Women brew the millet beer, which in a poor diet is an essential commodity of nourishment, apart from being a highly intoxicating source of solace. Women take a large part in building houses, and are entirely responsible for their repair by mud resurfacing. Women collect the reeds and make the thatch for roofs. Women fetch and carry water, tedious and back-breaking work in an arid land. Women collect and dry cow dung for fuel. In villages where all the able-bodied men are absent, women do all these jobs. Men milk the cows.

In other words, women do all the hard work and bear the brunt of the responsibility for village life. But women, by the very nature and variety of their duties as mothers and housewives, in addition to all these extraneous tasks, cannot possibly find the time needed to look after a soil as soft and treacherous as Basutoland's; and it is this situation which is more than any other responsible for the country being scarred with greedily widening gashes of erosion.

In the most fertile lands the cultivable area is yearly decreasing at an alarming rate. Erosion is in fact the country's national emergency. From long acquaintance with erosion it has, I am inclined to think, become a mental habit among many Basotho to regard it as inevitable. Despite the advice and entreaties of government agricultural officers, the measures which can be taken to stem it are neglected. Instead an answer is sought in extending the area under the plough into hilly and less profitable zones, in which the arrival of inexperienced men, and women with too many other things to do, causes the same processes of erosion to spread. The lowlands of Basutoland, the foothills, and even the highlands, are scratched into fields to a degree which itself speaks despair. Calculated in acres and set down on paper, the area under cultivation is increasing year by year. Actually, the productive capacity of the land per acre is decreasing year by year, and will continue to do so until erosion is arrested.

With this runs the problem that though the Basotho have for

many years been accustomed to handling money, a man's wealth is still counted in cattle. When a young man marries, he must present his bride's family with at least 15 head of cattle. In the Basotho courts, penalties are paid in cattle, and disagreements settled similarly. Every provident man knows the value of having a large herd, and every son whose father cannot provide a bride-gift saves his money at the mines and buys cattle to provide for his marriage. As a result, Basutoland, with its sparse grass coverage, is being expected to feed double or more than the number of cattle it is capable of supporting in good condition – and to cattle must be added horses, sheep and goats. In winter, when there is little enough food for human beings – many of whom must sleep with their stomachs pressed to the wall to ease the pangs of hunger – the sight of dead, dying, and starving animals presents a recurring and pitiable spectacle.

With this comes communal grazing. When the year's crops have been gathered in, the chief of the area concerned will declare the land free for grazing, and the animals, which till then have been kept away from the crops, are allowed to roam and graze where they will. The grass of Basutoland simply will not stand this. It is often grass of high grazing quality, but the water content of the soil is low, and grass which has been subjected to intensive feeding requires to be left for two years untouched to regain its vigour and nutritive value. This is thoroughly understood in the Orange Free State, where every grazing field is fenced and the movements of cattle are strictly controlled. Yet despite the fact that the Basutoland agricultural authorities beg chiefs and others to invest their wool and mohair profits in fences, and to rotate their grazing areas, there is little observable inclination to depart from the age-old custom of communal grazing. Thin and decrepit, the animals in winter traverse the impoverished land, vainly searching for nourishment, their runs forming further devastating avenues of erosion. The Basotho were reluctantly forced to accept the concept of a national frontier. They have still not accepted the concept of a fence.

The system of indirect rule through chiefs has clearly been responsible for perpetuating these and other traditions, and while pressure of population remained low, and men were free to go to South Africa to work, this caused no harm. It even had advantages. The chiefs kept the peace in their areas, and tribal

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standards of morality and conduct remained high. The system prevented the country from being too drastically exposed to the pressures of social change. The question now is whether some of these traditions have not outlived their uses.

* * *

Communal grazing brings us to the Basotho system of land tenure. As noticed earlier, Moshesh's land was where his people were, theirs to use and his the responsibility. When Basutoland was formed, this came fairly logically to mean that the entire country was Basotho property, for which the Paramount Chief was responsible, or in more legal terms, that the land is communal property held in trust for the people of Basutoland by the Paramount Chief, a trust that locally devolves upon area chiefs.

There is no such thing in Basutoland as a sale or purchase of land. If a man can convince a local chief that he needs land to cultivate or build on, the chief allocates him an area (for agricultural purposes this usually means six acres per family unit), and in practice the man can then occupy that land at the chief's pleasure as long as he cultivates it or lives there. The British traders whom Moshesh originally encouraged to come in, and who control much of Basutoland's commerce, hold their land and buildings on this basis, like everyone else, and are among the first to assure visitors that the land tenure arrangements of the Basotho give no cause for alarm. To a Mosotho, returning after five years or so in the mines, the advantages of being able to go to his chief and ask for six acres of farming land – and get them – speak for themselves.

But these pleasantly unconventional arrangements are now threatened by new factors. Since 1945 the population has risen sharply (the annual growth rate rose from 0.03 in 1946 to 1.6 in 1960), and with South Africa taking a tougher line on migrant labour, there is for the first time pressure on the land. The position has been reached in many places where a man who wishes to farm can no longer be certain of being given land. Meanwhile, for the rare Mosotho man who farms well and wishes to improve his output by taking advantage of the new techniques which the government is promoting, there are further difficulties.

For many years now it has been impossible to obtain your six acres in one piece. Over the years, large fields have been subdivided and given to other families, erosion further reducing the

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size of fields poorly tended. In many areas fields have been reduced to shapes in which using a plough is difficult, let alone a tractor, to hire which is now a practical possibility by becoming a member of a government-sponsored co-operative. Further, while the intelligent and willing are often unable to find good land, there are few villages in which one fails to see some of the best parcels of land being neglected.

There are usually reasons why chiefs permit good land to be retained by women too old to cultivate it or by men with no interest in it; but in the new conditions of population pressure, they are reasons that are rapidly losing their validity.

At the Agricultural Training School on the outskirts of Maseru, and in district extension centres, young men and women – but that there are men is the point – are being trained in improved methods of agriculture and stock-raising, and, aided by field officers of the Department of Agriculture, groups of progressive farmers have been formed, bringing new techniques and a new outlook on agriculture into the heart of the country. Difficulties in obtaining cultivable land, the tradition of communal grazing, and unwillingness to permit fields to be enclosed, stand gravely opposed to the ultimate success of these useful developments.

* * *

Another factor gnawing away at the land tenure system is the growing feeling among the educated that Basutoland should encourage the introduction of manufacturing industries. The country has a large and valuable reservoir of intelligent, educated and semi-educated manpower. Experience in South Africa has shown that whereas the Bantu in general make indifferent farmers, they do well as industrial employees. There is every reason to believe that what has been true in South Africa will be true in Basutoland.

Various difficulties confront the prospective capitalist. There are tremendous possibilities for the development of hydro-electric power in Basutoland, but to harness these resources would be wholly beyond the financial capacity of the government, and even were the capital raised it would still be several years before power would reach the areas where it was needed. Skilled building labour is extremely limited, and much of it is imported. The transport costs involved in reaching traditional markets, all of which are great distances away, make it self-evident that only

highly efficient industries with low overheads could pay their way.

These problems, however, are not new to capitalists, and many a new industry in Africa has successfully surmounted all of them and more. What is well and truly new, even to the most hardened, is the prospect of erecting a £3 million factory on a piece of land for which there are no title deeds. British families long resident in Basutoland, and who often echo the words of Eugène Casalis—'We are Basotho'—immediately point out that over periods of a hundred and more years they have never had the slightest cause to doubt the security of their tenure of land, once they have received permission to occupy it. This is undeniable. But the pleasant town houses of the commercial community, and the tin sheds and modest tin-roofed red houses of the British country traders, do not fall in quite the same category as the property of a factory employing perhaps several thousand men, an alteration of a shilling in whose pay can, in a country the size of Basutoland, become a national political issue, during which it is comforting to distant shareholders to know that at least the factory has a lease.

Until this question is solved, it is fair to assume that the development of industry, much as far-sighted Basotho may desire it, will remain an unlikely possibility.



11. THE GOLDEN FLEECE

BUT where tradition really comes into play as a force presenting great problems for Basutoland's development is to be seen at its clearest in the traditional way of life of Basotho men – men of the village, that is to say, not of the town.

This way of life follows a highly distinctive and unusual pattern, evolved over the past century and a half, and has profound emotional overtones for the entire nation, even among those educated Basotho who live in the towns and who no longer follow it. Though a way of life of gruelling hardship, it has for Basotho men a romance and dignity which is enshrined in their songs, their poetry and ideas. Underlying it is the fundamental belief that for a man life is a challenge, and with it runs another belief that nothing which comes easily in life is worth while. A man needs a challenge in order to be a man, and where no challenge exists, a man must go out and find one.

This attitude of mind is of basic importance in any understanding of the Basotho people. In most parts of the world a man who has had an easy life is envied, while those to whom things have come easily consider themselves fortunate. Something like the reverse is true of men from the villages of Basutoland.

Traditional life begins with a short phase of early childhood during which a boy has complete freedom, is petted and seldom scolded, and is told things by his parents, who treat him almost as if he were an adult. About the age of four, when he is considered old enough to learn things by observation and not have to be told, this phase is followed by one of parental indifference, more marked in the father than in the mother, and calculated to rouse the child's respect, even in some cases fear. It is his first introduction to the challenge without which he will not become a man.

At the age of five or six he assumes his first duties, and becomes a herdboy, aided at first by a brother a year or so older, if there is one. In a lowland family this generally means taking the flocks and herds to graze in the hills each day, returning at night. In

the hills, far from adults, he meets other boys engaged in the same occupation as he, and learns to fight with sticks, accepting challenges and offering them.

In the case of a highland family the separation from home is more complete. The grazing areas are frequently high up and far from home, and the herdboys take their flocks and herds, spending months on end in the mountains. They set out from home with such food as they can carry or load on an animal's back, but this is soon exhausted, and the boys are reduced to killing snakes and polecats, and learning to hit birds with a well-aimed stone. With luck there will be a cow with calf, and by smearing the cow's udder with dung one can keep the milk for oneself and prevent the calf having it. One would like to, but one does not, kill and eat the calf, because cattle is wealth, and at home it would not be well received if instead of guarding the expanding wealth one had been eating and diminishing it. One can however kill and eat the calves of others, and after a year or so, when one is no longer one of the smallest boys in the mountains, one becomes pretty proficient at this, watching the newly arrived five-year-olds who have not yet learned to notice when a calf strays. Sometimes, with other boys similarly hungry, one can form a gang and become really effective at getting enough to eat, though of course there are always other gangs of older boys to be taken into consideration.

Here we face the astonishing fact that Basutoland's herds and flocks, the backbone of her economic existence, are entirely in the charge of unschooled boys aged between five and about 18. Stocktheft – the prehistory of southern Africa can be condensed in the word – is not unsurprisingly the principal crime in Basutoland, accounting for 20 per cent of the country's adult male prison population at any one time, and for one-third of male juvenile offenders.

The most businesslike thefts are those organized from South Africa. In these it is not unusual for gangs to cross the frontier in remote mountain areas and in daylight drive off whole herds under the eyes of the powerless herdboys. A few hours later the same herds are in cattle trains heading for the slaughterhouses of Johannesburg. Following up cases of stocktheft is a main occupation of the Basutoland Mounted Police, operating under conditions of great difficulty. It is often many hours after a theft that a

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herdboy realizes that his missing numbers have been stolen, and have not merely strayed. If he is alone in a wild spot he dare not leave his herd untended in order to make a report. Thefts made from South Africa are conducted over little-known passes in the Drakensberg, where the traditional co-operation between the Basutoland Mounted Police and the South African Police is hampered by the fact that the nearest South African police posts lie far away beyond the foot of the mountains.

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The situation assumes even more serious proportions when it comes to the valuable sheep and goats of the foothills and lowlands. For many years past, with considerable success and great determination and effort, the Department of Agriculture has been pursuing a policy of building up the annual cash value of the country's wool and mohair exports on the basis of improved quality. This has been done by introducing and steadily encouraging the growth of flocks of Merino sheep and Angora goats, and by persistent propaganda and personal advice to stockowners throughout the country on the value of these animals, how to look after them, how and when to shear them, and – above all – on the vital importance of not allowing them to breed with the native stock, whose wool and mohair is of little commercial value, the wool of a crossbred sheep reverting invariably to low quality.

The policy aim is that in due course the native stock should be entirely replaced by the Merino and the Angora. Every year quality Merino sheep are purchased at the Bloemfontein sales and sold to Basotho farmers at government-subsidized prices. The farmers are glad to have them, are in fact proud of them; but every year, despite all advice and propaganda, they allow these precious animals to crossbreed, with the result that 90 per cent of the annual wool clip fails to reach the mean price on the international market.

The animals themselves add their special contribution to making the situation even sadder. Merino sheep, with their lordly appearance and splendidly curled horns, and Angora goats, with their exquisite white hair shining like silver in the sunlight, thrive to perfection in the climate of Basutoland, producing – curiously enough, this is partly due to the poor grazing conditions – wool and mohair of an extreme fineness, which if

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maintained and sold pure would fetch a top world price, being finer than anything that can be produced in the Orange Free State, geographical conditions favouring Basutoland and fineness.

But this is not all. Most, if not all, Basotho farmers know that it is long mohair and fully-grown wool which command the best price; they know that if they are short of money before the year is out they can obtain credit loans or advances on sales. Yet they persist in shearing a large number of animals twice a year, thereby halving their potential income. As if this were not enough, large amounts of wool and mohair, when they reach the trader, are found to be full of dung, which automatically places them in a lower sales category.

To understand the significance of this we must take a look at the background conditions in which the Basutoland authorities are trying to improve the quality of the output.

Basutoland's mohair is sold through Port Elizabeth; her wool is auctioned at the international wool markets at Durban and East London, Basutoland being a member of the South African Wool Board. South Africa is the fourth largest wool-producing country in the world, and one does not have to be in that country more than a few days to realize that wool is a very serious business. I remember reflecting after a week that I had never been in a country where so many sheep get their pictures in the papers. It is nothing to find the leading newspapers devoting entire pages to the problems of sheep and wool.

In the days before Basutoland began her bid for the quality market, her dung-ridden, oily brown fleeces used to make their depressed way to the coast, where the auctioneers looked at them and said 'Native produce', the wretched bundles being sold at the end of the auction for a few pence, along with similar products from native areas in South Africa.

Nothing dies harder than a tradition, and nothing is more tradition-bound than commerce. To persuade the tough-minded international wool buyers of Durban that by opening a bundle from Basutoland one would find anything other than dung-ridden, oily brown fleece has been a major undertaking. Only by achieving the same 100 per cent standards of graded quality maintained by the European farmers of South Africa can confidence in the Basotho product be bred, and without that

confidence, which has not yet been achieved, a bundle of Basotho wool or mohair, however high its quality, cannot reach the auction for graded quality products, and can therefore never fetch the price it may deserve.

It is a mark of partial success that Basotho wool has now established for itself a category of its own midway between European farms and native wool, and that its mohair, which comes still nearer to world standards, can sometimes be marketed as Cape mohair, which is what buyers are after. But there is a long way to go yet before confidence is established, and to do this requires the co-operative determination of every stock farmer in the country, an issue which revolves round the herdboy system and other traditions.

A crossbred sheep, it is defensively said, produces tastier meat. A tribal doctor – this is not said, but it is known to all – requires a black sheep for his medicines and magic, and black sheep must therefore not be allowed to die out. So when an extension officer visits the latest farmer who has purchased subsidized Merino stock and finds a proliferation of half-breeds, his expressions of despair and frustration are answered by regretful smiles. Naturally everyone agrees it is a pity.

In a recent report the Department of Agriculture issued a *cri de coeur* on the subject, saying that many farmers 'seem determined to undermine the only paying industry we have by disregarding . . . advice by the Department and plain economic facts; . . . this, in a country most suited to the production of the finest possible Merino wool. It is difficult to find words sufficiently adequate to warn the Basuto nation of the seriousness of neglecting and failing to improve their heritage – the Merino – the life-blood of Basutoland and bearer of the "Golden Fleece".'

12. THE SCHOOL AND THE LODGE

BEFORE discussing ritual circumcision, which is the next landmark in traditional life, it should be explained that the cult of circumcision in Basutoland, as in many parts of Africa, is surrounded by a wall of absolute secrecy, which excludes even Africans who have not been through a circumcision lodge. This, in fact, provides one of the strangest features of the matter: that an educated African of the town knows almost as little about the cult as the average European would, and is almost as dependent on European research into it as we are.

Owing to this wall of secrecy, it is still not possible to say with complete accuracy how a Basutoland circumcision lodge is conducted, even though the matter has been the subject of European inquiry for more than a hundred years. Some of the more detailed accounts of the cult are in French, the work of Roman Catholic missionaries. In English Mr. Hugh Ashton gives a thorough description of his investigations and findings in *The Basuto*. Educated Basotho, whether or not they have been through a lodge, are sensitive to discussion of the subject, and when in 1963 the Roman Catholic Church, as a means of dissuading parents from allowing their sons to enrol in lodges, published on a basis of selective readership an account of the lodge, including (in Sesotho) the texts of some of the circumcision songs, it caused little short of an uproar in educated circles, and the book had to be withdrawn. But as is shown by its inclusion in the Basotho calendar, circumcision is of great importance in traditional life, and in any account of Basutoland some reference to it is inescapable. The description of it given here is based on Mr. Ashton's findings and various missionary accounts in French, supplemented by such other information as I was able to gather while in the country. It remains to place the caveat that it cannot be regarded as completely certain where accuracy is concerned.

During the herdboy phase in a boy's life he comes to know, from young men who are – as they are somewhat stylishly described in English – initiates, of the exciting and important experience which lies before him, when he will go to join an

initiation lodge, be told many secret things, and learn what it is to be transformed from a boy into a man. Nothing specific is revealed to him; what takes place in a lodge is a secret shared exclusively by initiates. From innuendo and rumour the boy may derive some idea that a severe ordeal lies before him; but if when his time comes he shows disinclination to go with the others, he is first dissuaded by the taunts and mockery of older men and women in the village, and if this fails he is punished.

An initiation 'school', as it is sometimes called, usually consists of between 20 and 30 boys, and it lasts for several weeks during mid-winter. It is held out in the veld or amid the hills, well away from the village, and none save initiates are permitted to approach it. The various mud huts required to house it are destroyed after the lodge disperses. The lodge is in the charge of a senior initiate appointed by the chief and assisted by various others. A tribal doctor anoints the boys with medicine at various stages of the proceedings, to protect them from fear and sorcery, and to invigorate their manly and warlike qualities.

Life in the lodge is exceedingly tough. It is in any case life in the raw, a community in the wild, a return to the days of the primitive Basotho who did not make fire with matches. But it is rendered doubly hard by the disciplines imposed by those in charge. Every physical task has to be undertaken in the most difficult way. When collecting firewood in the veld, instead of each boy carrying what he can, the day's collection is stacked in a solid mass – one I saw was about the size of twelve coffins – on the backs of the boys, who struggle anonymously beneath it, while around them the initiates and the tribal doctor jump and yell and sing the ritual songs, occasionally lashing out with whips at any boy who slackens from the cohesion of the pack.

On their return to the lodge headquarters they are told to rehearse the ritual songs they have learned, the slightest error of one occasioning punishment for the whole group. Reverting to the days before the blanket reached the Basotho, skins are worn. At night the boys lie in a row on their backs, the palms of their hands joined beside the left ear, the upper parts of their bodies naked in temperatures which outside the hut are many degrees below freezing and are not much better within. The slightest movement made by any boy, and the entire lodge is awakened and punished.

THE SCHOOL AND THE LODGE

The subjects learnt at the 'school' include tribal lore, sex technique, and – taught by practice – robbing and stealing. Lore and sex are taught mainly in songs that must be learned by heart. The songs are in archaic Sesotho; the sexual ones are blatantly obscene, the uniform tenor of them being the degradation of women. Before the lodge disperses, each boy must compose and perfect a song in praise of tribe and chief.

On the night of circumcision the boys are stripped to their loin-cloths and remain out of doors most of the night. At the first light they are brought one by one before the tribal doctor, who in the presence of the initiates gives each boy a sudden, sharp order to raise his eyes and honour his chief, and as he does so slashes off the foreskin. This is accompanied by the yells and shouts of the initiates, a disturbance which effectively smothers the cries of any boy quick enough to perceive what is going to be done to him. Such are seized and forcibly circumcized.

After the circumcision the boys are given a medicine containing a drug derived from the leshoma bulb. This renders them senseless for 24 hours. When subsequently it becomes necessary to clean their wounds, their cries of pain are again drowned by the shouts and clamour of the others. The lodge continues for another two weeks or so, the boys at first wearing nothing but a skin about their shoulders in continuing sub-zero temperatures, until they are able once more to wear a loincloth. They are subjected to frequent whippings. The lodge concludes with a feast at which they are reunited with their folk, and another batch of Basotho have become men.

They discover in due course that by becoming men they have in effect joined a kind of secret society, membership of which bestows social superiority over those who have not been circumcized – at least, not in a lodge. When Basotho meet others they do not know – at the mines, for example – they can in a matter of seconds identify who among them are initiates, the language of their secret songs acting as a code which no uninitiated Mosotho can understand. Such who fail to identify themselves are classed as boys and addressed as such, finding themselves excluded from 'adult' society.

Extend this distinction between initiated and uninitiated, and the definition of adult that goes with it, making it embrace the whole of Basotho adult male society, and its extraordinary nature

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becomes apparent. Among the 'adults' stand the miners, farmers, stock thieves and others, the semi-literate and the illiterate; among the 'adolescents' stand the Basotho priests, teachers, doctors, civil servants, roughly everyone in authority and everyone connected with civilized life, few if any of whom have been through a lodge. Such are regarded by initiates as men who do not share the secrets of the tribe, and who have broken the tribal law by marrying without initiation. For priests and teachers in particular it presents psychological problems of great difficulty. Such is the isolation it imposes, and such is the emotional pull of the old traditional life, that I think there must be few educated Basotho men today who would deny that they somewhere harbour a sense of guilt at not having been through a circumcision lodge.

* * *

As the earlier phase of traditional life – the herdboy phase – militates against the proper development of Basutoland's main source of prosperity, so the next phase – the circumcision lodge – militates against education. Basutoland's network of primary schools, run by missions and financially assisted by government, is about the most extensive in Africa. There are few parts of the country where a boy has to walk more than four miles to school, which in the dispersed conditions of Africa is an achievement, and is doubly so in a region as difficult as the Maluti mountains. The breadth and standard of primary education, as originally established by the Missions Evangéliques, and which the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and later-arriving missions have maintained in their own schools, are usually considered to be exceptional in Africa and enjoy the advantages of a long tradition dating back at least a century.

The herdboy system, particularly in the mountains, is an obvious drawback to attendance at school. The circumcision lodge provides another and graver drawback. The traditionally approved age for initiation is between 16 and 18, but in practice, owing to the need for making up the numbers to form an effective lodge, this age sometimes falls as low as 12. Due to his herding, a Mosotho boy in general makes a late start with his schooling, with the result that the age phases for primary education and initiation coincide.

In the years preceding a boy's initiation there is considerable

talk about it in his family circle (though never revealing what it is), usually engendering in the boy a state of either excitement or fear, neither of them a background conducive to study. In the limited world of his village, which is all he knows at that age, initiation seems much more exciting than school, and far more important. Reading, writing, and arithmetic have nothing to do with becoming a man. Everything in village life – the innuendo of older boys, the hints and smiles of the women, the mystery surrounding initiation – reinforces this idea. The emotional pull of a boy's life is away from school.

The teacher, who is not an initiate, and who unless he is exceedingly observant will remain in complete ignorance of the fact that a circumcision lodge is being formed, is in no position to advise a boy or his parents (though teachers often bravely try to), because on this particular subject, concerning the secret life of the tribe in which he does not partake, his words carry no weight whatever. One day the teacher comes to school to find five or six boys absent. They remain absent for several weeks. The term ends, to be followed by a holiday and a new enrolment.

But after the strain and excitement of the lodge, and amid the praises of the village and the grandeurs of entering into manhood, the average boy is in far too restless a mood to be inclined to return to school to sit beside a lot of little boys who know nothing about life. It is time to be thinking about the next step in the tradition – the mines. The lodge in such a case marks the exact point at which an education ends – usually in standard one or two. In the wilds of Basutoland, as throughout most of Africa, it is not a question of being able to make up in adult evening classes for what was not done at school. The opportunity for education comes once in a lifetime.

With younger initiates, who have some years to go before the mines will accept them, attempts are sometimes made to enable the boy to resume schooling. But as an African priest of great experience explained it to me in plain words, a boy who returns to school from the lodge comes back in most cases as 'an uncontrollable little brute'. Aged perhaps 14 or even less, he considers himself a man among boys, and with his mind impregnated with the obscenities he has learnt at the lodge, and with his practical prowess as a thief, in school he is an indisciplined nuisance and a thoroughly bad influence. For these reasons many schools will

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not accept an initiate, or will do so only on certain conditions (see also pp. 109–110). But even where a boy is re-accepted he seldom completes his education. Fundamentally unsettled, he sticks it for a few months, then absents himself and does not come again.

The psychology and emotions surrounding the lodge find their best expression in the nostalgic choral songs that are to be heard wherever Basotho gather together to sing – except in church. In these songs – invariably beautiful musically – the words tell in sadness of a faraway mountain where in the gladness of youth we gathered round a beloved teacher, and they end with a sigh for the noble past, and a pledge to the comrades who shared those hours. Listening, it is hard to recognize here the squalid frightfulness of ritual circumcision. Nowhere, in fact, better than in such songs is the psychological struggle of present-day Basutoland exemplified.



13. THE GOLD MINES OF SOUTH AFRICA

IF the emotions which the circumcision lodge arouses in a Mosotho are difficult for an outsider to appreciate, the romance and dignity of the next phase in traditional life has a worldwide and irresistible appeal. Far out in the mountains, struggling on foot along a track which has defied the sturdiest jeep, one will see in the distance a young man approaching, walking without haste, but with a determination that has about it a kind of inevitability. He is alone, and one can sense that he is conscious of his loneliness. Over his shoulder he carries a small wrapped-up bundle of possessions. Of all the people met with by the way, he alone does not tarry to ask long and detailed questions about who one is, where one has come from, where one is going, and why. This man passes with the greeting of the country – ‘Peace!’ – and is gone; and no one need ask him who he is or whither he goes. Everyone can see. He is on his way to Gaudeng, the City of Gold.

There is fear in his heart, fear which he seeks to master as he walks. Going underground is part of it, but what prompts it more insistently is the knowledge that in a day or so he will be in the African underworld of Johannesburg, the toughest city on earth, with its rival gangs whose activities almost make one associate Chicago with children’s games. But fear does him no harm. In the words of an old chief, a Mosotho who has lost fear is a lost man. Before him lies the challenge which makes life a man’s life and worth living.

The gold mines of South Africa offer the most perfect example of man-management in the world. Miners are recruited from every country in southern Africa, and every government, white and black, anxiously seeks to ensure that its quota of men accepted by the mines is as high as possible. Formerly rules concerning length of contract were not strictly adhered to. If a man wished to stay on and his work was good, within reason he could stay. The Portuguese administration in Moçambique stood alone in insisting that after 18 months at the mines a man must return to his village and remain there between six months and a year

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before taking another contract. These arrangements were intended to ensure the healthy continuance of tribal life, and to prevent that neglect of the land so painfully demonstrated in Basutoland. They have now been adopted by South Africa and made law, miners being engaged on one-year contracts extendable by six months and no more, after which they are expected to return home for a spell pending re-engagement if they are required.

Recruiting in Basutoland is carried out by a number of organizations of which the Native Recruiting Corporation, the agent of the Transvaal and Orange Free State Chamber of Mines in Johannesburg, is the largest and has offices in most of the Basutoland district towns. Here men are selected after a physical check, and their fares paid to the mines.

On arrival at the labour reception depot in Johannesburg, which handles with seemingly effortless ease the daily arrivals and departures of hundreds of Africans from nine different countries and speaking dozens of different languages, they are given a thorough medical examination and are X-rayed by one of the most remarkable pieces of equipment in the world capable of dealing with – and processing the chest photographs of – a thousand men per morning. The rolls of film are catalogued and ‘filed’ in a photographic library, in which, in the subsequent event of a suspected case of pneumoconiosis, in a matter of minutes a man’s complete chest record during his years at the mines can be produced. The recruit’s clothes and all his possessions are fumigated, and shortly afterwards he is on his way to one of the mines. Men from different countries have preferences for certain mines; mines have preferences for certain men. In most cases these preferences are met, and a recruit is thus likely to find himself among friends from the day of his arrival.

Before going underground for the first time new recruits are given a series of intelligence tests, by means of which they are classed in three categories: non-mechanical, mechanical, and supervisory. Of these tests the most interesting is that of the leaderless group, in which, out of sight of the rest, six men are confronted with an 8-ft. wall and an 8-ft. length of 2-in. pipe, and told to get themselves and the pipe over the wall. An interesting feature of this test is that almost invariably the first man to take the leadership and get the rest started turns out not to be the



An example of gulley erosion near the capital. Soil erosion is one of the country's gravest problems

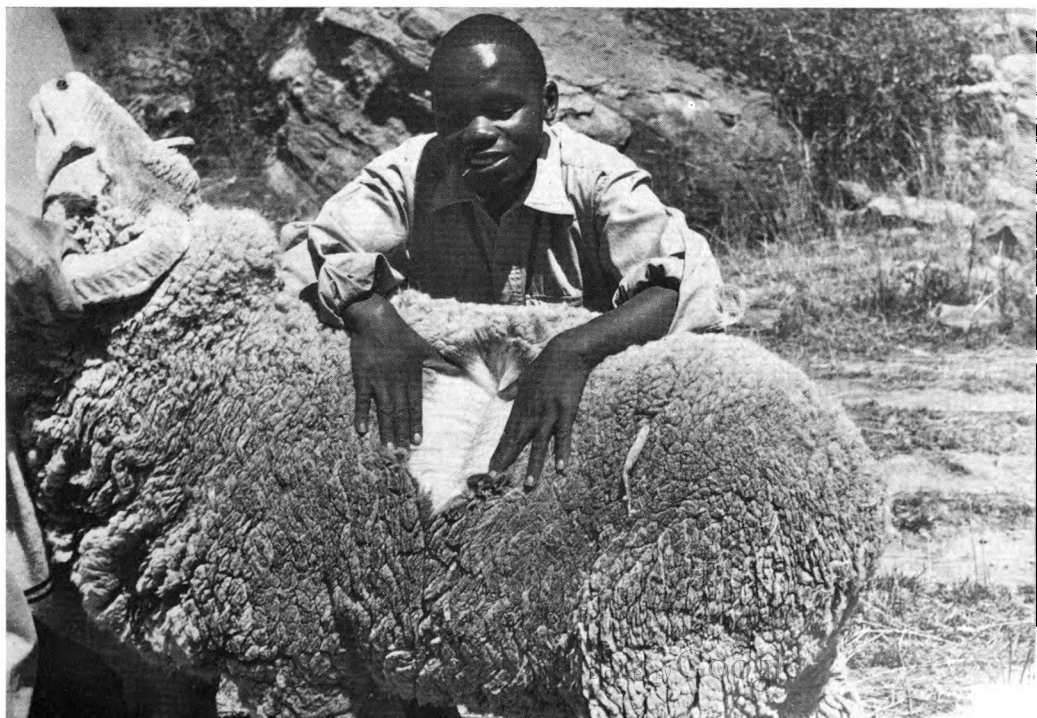


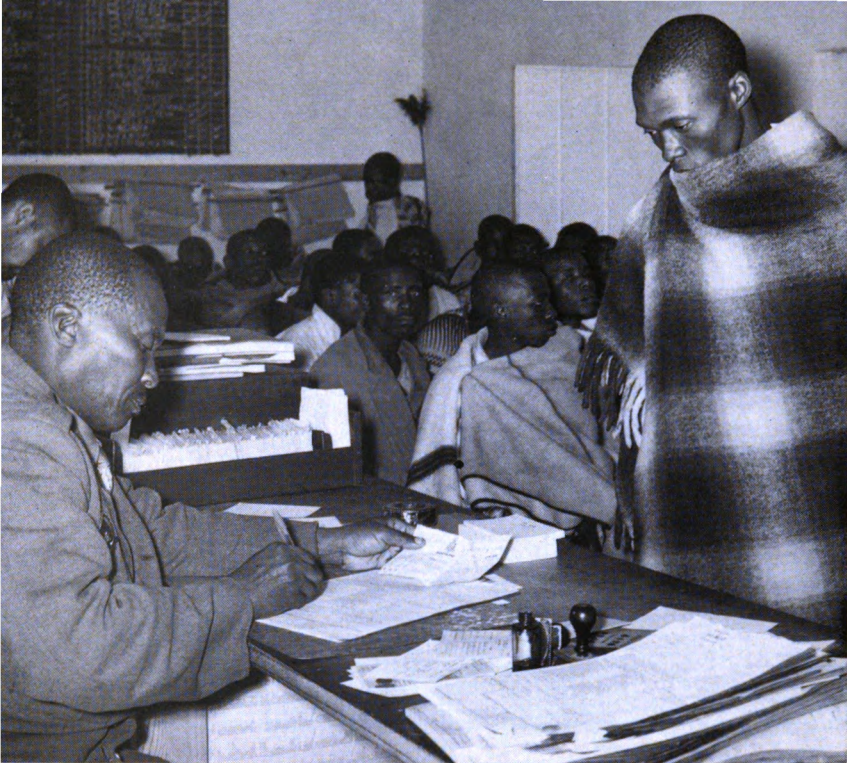
Above: Earth-moving equipment is used for terracing, making artificial water channels and other soil conservation measures. *Below:* Labourers and tractor-drawn graders make contour furrows to save the precious, powdery earth from being washed away by rain





Above: Goats in the Maluti foothills. Angora goats thrive in Basutoland and mohair is the second most valuable export. *Below:* The most valuable export – the finest quality wool from Merino sheep



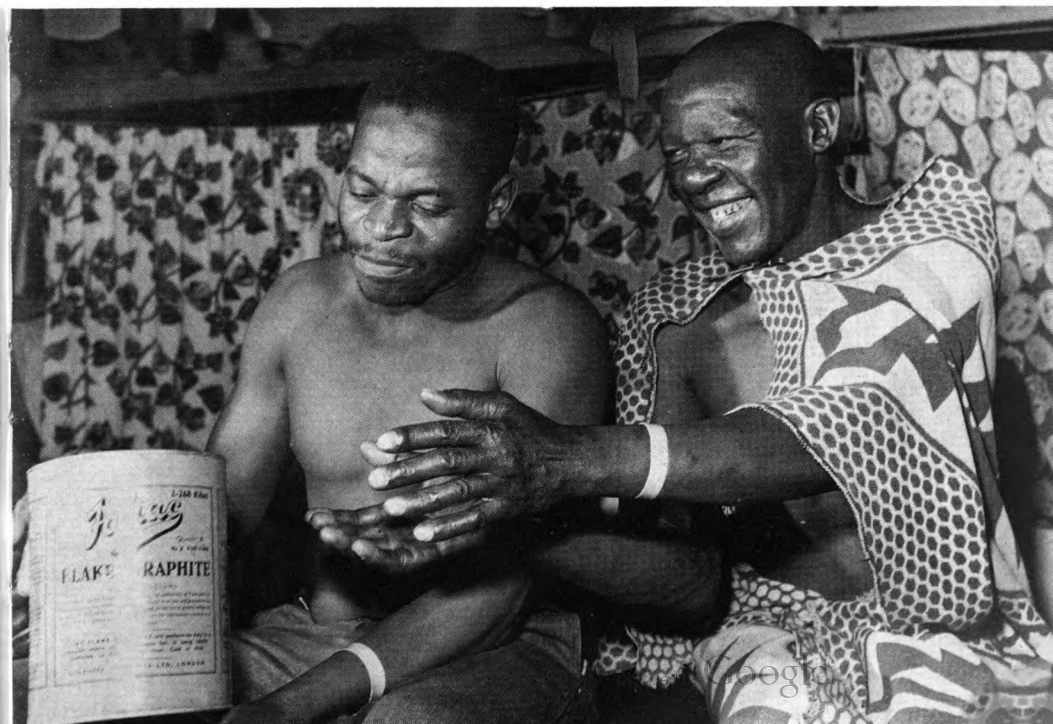


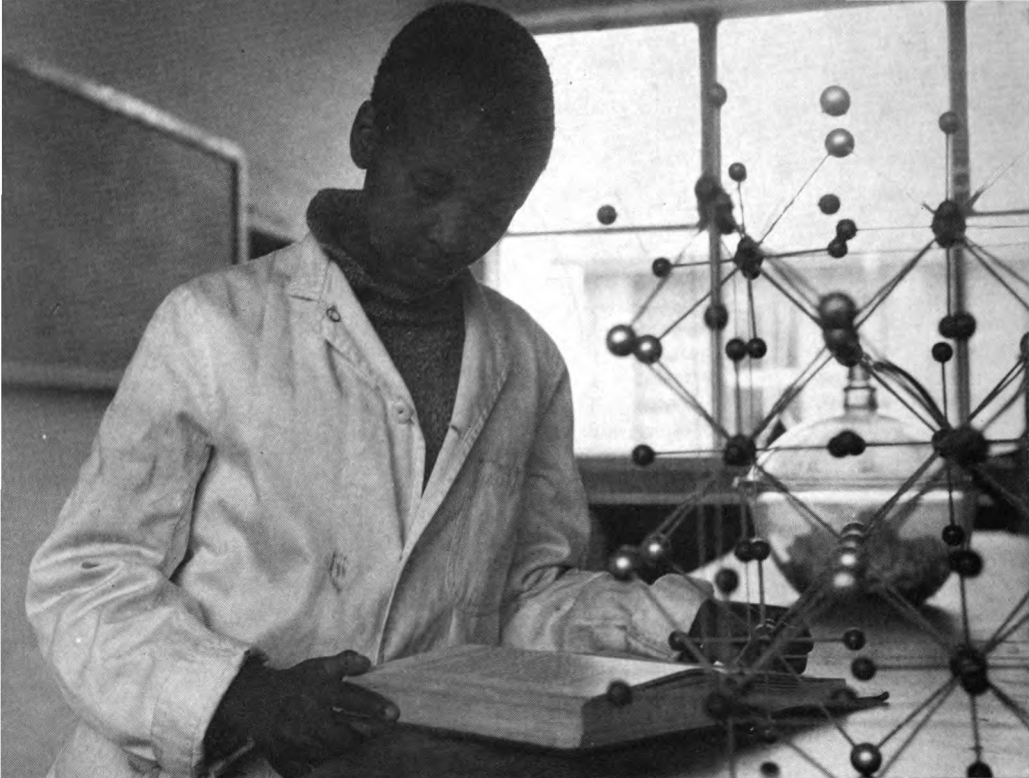
The money men earn in South Africa is vital to Basutoland's economy.
Above: A mine volunteer watching his contract drawn up at the Native Recruiting Corporation's Depot, Maseru. *Below:* A 27-year-old Mosotho who has spent



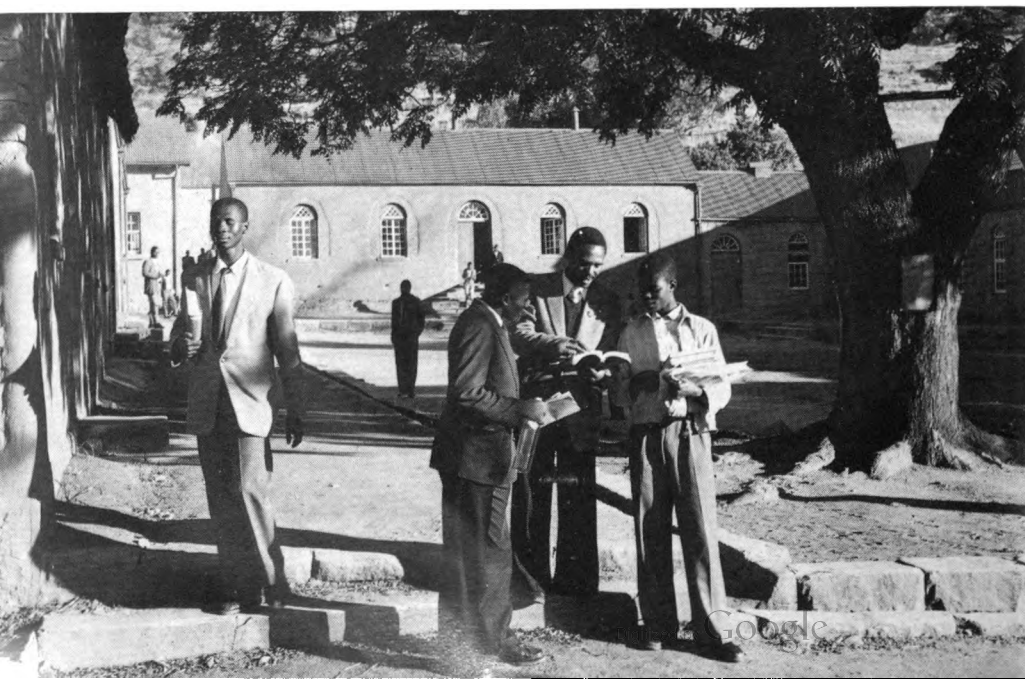


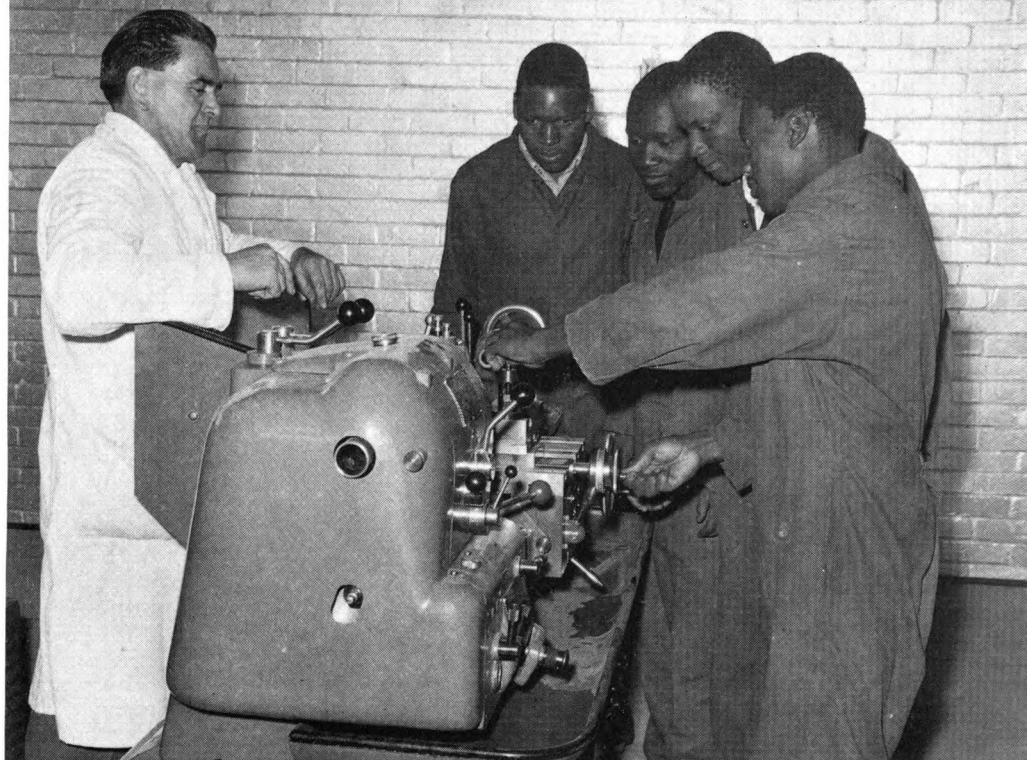
a total of five years in the mines. *Above right*: Basotho and other miners from all over southern Africa watch a mines' football match. *Below right*: In a mine dormitory, millet beer from an improvised container





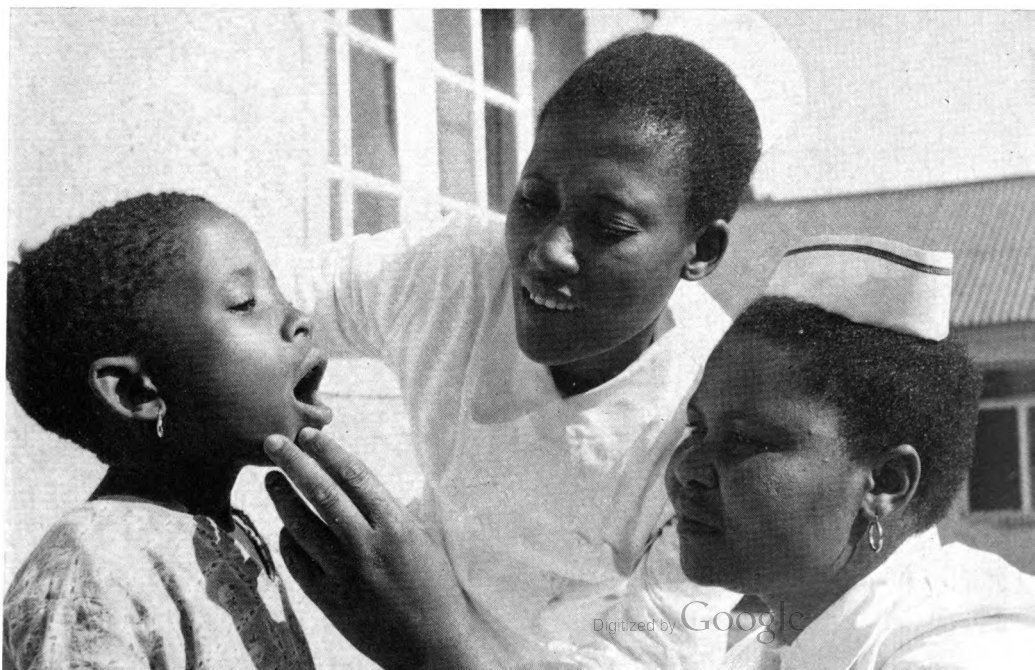
Above: A Mosotho science student at the university, opened in 1963, which also serves Bechuanaland and Swaziland. *Below:* Basutoland Training College, Morija.





Engineering class at Lerotholi Artisan Training School, Maseru

Nurses at work at the Maseru Health Centre





Above: A Mosotho stock farmer

Left: A trainee teacher at St Mary's College, Roma

Below: The Basotho are keen choral singers and dancers



Sunday finery in Maseru



natural leader, who, if there is one in the group, reveals himself as the problem develops and he begins to grasp its full difficulties. Almost imperceptibly he then begins to give directions, while without being conscious of it the other five are obeying him. A member of the mine staff watches the test, and when such a leader appears, his name is listed among the supervisory, who will be selected for underground promotion when the contractual flow of labour through the mines brings his name to the top of the list.

During these first days on the surface the recruits are given lessons in hygiene and first aid, and by means of films taken at the mine face are taught the basic working vocabulary of *fana-kolo*. This international underground language is a source of dismay to etymologists and of disgust to African nationalists, but in the polyglot community of the mines it not only settles the thorny tribal problem of whose language shall be dominant, but provides the simple medium of quick communication, understood by all, which is essential for action in emergency, and desirable always in the intense heat and oppressive atmosphere thousands of feet below, where a hard job is not rendered any easier by having to remember what a hammer is in Xhosa.

Those selected for mechanical jobs are shown how to use a drill in artificially created mine conditions, and a section of mine railway, complete with trucks, is used to school recruits in the use of these devices, including the art of stopping a truck which is apparently hurtling into infinity. The fifth day after their arrival comes the first shift, the first experience of being lowered into the earth to depths which in some mines go down to 11,000 feet, as low as Basutoland's mountains are high.

It is typical of the Basotho, with their belief in challenge, that in the mines their name should be associated with the difficult, testing, and often dangerous job of shaft-sinking, in which a high degree of teamwork is required. Their reputation for shaft-sinking is a source of satisfaction to them in the society of the mines, and so too is the extra pay it earns them. Outside the mines they enjoy the less enviable reputation of having organized the most effective gang in the Johannesburg underworld (its members are known as the 'Russians') to combat the powerful drainpipe trouser gang (the *tsotsi*) who are their sworn enemies. The Basotho insist that they formed their blanketed gang as a measure of

self-defence, simple country people that they were, at the mercy of city thugs. This may be true, but it has not made them any more beloved of the South African Police.

Together with these obviously satisfying aspects of a world of challenge, however, must be set the fact that a Mosotho miner, if he keeps his nose out of trouble, is looked after at the mines to a degree he never possibly could be at home. Welfare officers help him with personal problems; the recruiting agency remits his money home for him and makes sure it reaches the right person; the least complaint at the mine can be personally voiced to the compound manager, who will not have reached such a post unless he shows the sense of dedication to high standards, in the human side of management as in everything else, which is the arrestingly distinctive characteristic of South Africa's gold and diamond industry.

If a miner is sick he receives treatment in modern and expertly staffed hospitals owned by the mines. If he is incapacitated he will be compensated, but in fact there are few injuries which the skilled surgeons and therapists between them cannot mend, no expense is spared, and every Mosotho miner of any intelligence knows at the back of his mind that whatever happens he is in safe hands.

His health is a major concern of the mining company. Once a month, when he goes for his pay, he is weighed as a spot check on his condition. The overwhelming number of Africans put on weight within days of reaching the mines, and return to their countries in markedly better physical condition than when they left home.

Nor is this surprising when one examines the conditions of life in a mine compound. That the job is tough, and can be dangerous, is recognized; that it is well done is recognized too. Above ground everything is done to make life as pleasant as possible. At the end of a shift the miner surfaces into a peaceful and attractive world of lawns and trees laid out as a park, around which are the dormitories and other mine buildings. After a shower and a change of clothes he collects a mountain of well-cooked food, greatly superior in preparation and nutritive balance to anything he could get at home, and which he can eat either in a mess or in the more intimate surroundings of his dormitory, where he is among others of his tribe. The galley is open all day,

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and a miner can return for more as many times as he wishes.

The centre of social life tends to be the compound bar, which has its own brewery supplying millet beer, of which there is a free daily ration of a gallon a day to every miner. Anything taken in excess of this – it happens – must be paid for. As in other parts of the world, a saloon bar provides for the more exclusive who prefer a quiet brandy away from rowdier elements. The sight of four Africans of different tribes seated with their beer at a table in the sun, painfully threading through differences of language as they speak of their respective countries, bears with it its own message. The gold mines are a kind of education for those whom circumcision lodges have prevented from having anything more advanced. A mine which is free of trouble-makers – and these occur as everywhere else in life – has a relaxed, convivial atmosphere, conveying at once the truth about the mines on which hundreds of thousands of Africans are agreed – that it is a good life.



Each tribal group has an elected chief, responsible to the management for discipline. The chief has his own council to advise him, and disputes are settled according to tribal law. There are of course fights and unruliness, but the fact that it is a commonplace on the Reef to find four Europeans in charge of

20,000 African miners gives an indication of how smoothly things run.

Such figures render even more remarkable the high degree of personal contact between management and men, and the many personal arrangements springing therefrom within the framework of the contract laws. For example, if a man has proved himself an efficient supervisor or mechanic, he will with the management's permission – indeed, encouragement – write to a friend at home who has similarly distinguished himself, telling him to come to the mines on the date when his own contract expires. In this way two skilled men will alternate for years on the same job. There are a great many of these personal touches.

The decorative appearance of the miners' dormitories is a subject taken very seriously. Making full use of national colours and items of tribal accoutrement or association, the miners make their dormitories resplendent as miniature Basutolands, Malawis, and Moçambiques.

But the underlying spirit of the mines is perhaps best revealed in the matter of boots. Every miner has to buy his own boots, and these have cost 14s. 6d. a pair since the year 1910. In 1952, costs of production having risen over the years, the managements decided that what was now a concealed form of charity must be brought to an end, and put the price up. Their action provoked one of the very rare occasions where there were near-riots in the compounds. With a sigh the managements realized they had tackled the impossible, and capitulated. Boots now cost £1. 17s. 6d. a pair, but are still sold at 14s. 6d., a figure which is recognized as being as unalterable as the date on a Maria Theresa dollar. How long the gold mines, operating as they do on a 1 per cent margin of profit, can continue to conduct their affairs on this benevolent society basis is a fruitful subject for speculation, but if the far-seeing men who control this formidable industry have their way, it will be indefinitely.

* * *

The return of a Mosotho from the mines has a splendour about it which provides one of the finest sights in Basutoland life. The essential prelude to return is a shopping spree in Johannesburg or one of the neighbouring towns on the Reef. There must be presents for everyone at home; no one must be forgotten. Transistor radios, torches, mirrors, kitchen utensils, rolls of cloth,

harnesses, ribbons, scissors, shoes, and goodness knows what are assembled in magnificent and costly jumble. Beneath the weight of it the Mosotho staggers into a train with others in a similar predicament to undertake a journey of indescribable discomfort and difficulty, by the end of which many of the mechanical objects have reached a stage where they will arrive but never function. At his home district town he receives his deferred pay, often a fat sum, with part of which he makes his final purchases – usually a sack of grain and other foodstuffs for the feast that lies ahead. The by now prodigious amount of *impedimenta* is loaded on two or even three mules, and with the sack of grain laid over the front of his saddle the miner mounts his horse, and with a suitable escort – say, two or three mounted friends from the village – rides at the head of a procession which, as with the solitary man who descended from the hills, halts for none, superbly set upon its route, with ‘Peace!’ to this person and ‘Peace!’ to that – the blanketed horseman as God intended him to be, with his mules and wealth, and his admiring friends. Many hail him; many shout after him; but none need ask. The conquering hero comes.

* * *

Perhaps on this return, perhaps on the next, but generally before the age of 25, comes marriage, the grant of six acres, and the tradition of life beginning all over again. In the bad old days when Basotho, on finally leaving the mines, wasted away in the slums of Johannesburg, eating not enough and drinking too much, it used to be said that a man only returned to Basutoland to die; and it is still possible to find villages where traces of this former life are evident. The present South African laws ensure that a man returns to a last phase of life which is better than it used to be, and which has created problems of its own. He now returns able-bodied, to enjoy a well-earned rest with his wife and growing children, a life in which, a spot of cattle-thieving apart, there is nothing honourable to do except talk. He has longed for such a moment. The poetry and songs which surround the life of the mines are impregnated with nostalgia for home. But nostalgia is one thing, work another; and here once more we have the problem we started with, that small boys are sent off to look after the cows, while father sits at home.

The future of Basutoland now lies with her own politicians,

and how they will deal with the problems of the countryside and the country people will be of great interest to anyone who has seen some of these problems at first hand. Bold would he be who suggested that there were any easy solutions in the pattern of opposed elements with which the land is laced.

As a European civil servant remarked with considerable truth, 'The Basotho have come to regard their country as a kind of rest camp, a place to go to when they are in need of a holiday'.

This is of course an exaggeration, but an exaggeration sometimes serves to point the issue, and there is no doubt that the tradition that a man should work outside his own country, when combined with a temperament that has never shown much aptitude for skilled agriculture, provides a most serious drawback to the proper development of a country which each winter and spring is gravely short of food. From this stems the fact that it is left to women to bear disproportionate agricultural burdens, while erosion eats away at the land, it being more than women can do to stem it. It is this fact too which in some measure stands against the growing of vegetables and the diversification of diet which many people so urgently need. As any Chinese farmer will tell one, vegetables grown by women is a contradiction in terms; vegetables demand more attention than women, with their many other duties, can afford to give.

'We just have to be patient', I was told on many occasions by educated Basotho; 'the spread of education will gradually bring these difficulties to an end.'

The educated Basotho of the towns are themselves proof that this is undeniable. Meanwhile the spread of education proceeds against two combined obstacles of tradition – the herdboy system and the circumcision lodge – while the disinclination of adult men to look after their herds and flocks facilitates stocktheft, one of the curses of the country, and is to some extent responsible for the crossbreeding of Basutoland's precious Merino sheep.

Over this scene lies a land tenure system which, though it has certain remarkable qualities, shows signs of being inadequate to meet the situation of a growing pressure of population, and presents drawbacks to the development of industry, while the tradition of communal grazing (with which is linked the attitude that cattle is wealth) stands opposed to the more intensive agricultural use of land which the country now needs, prevents the

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re-growth of enough grass for the stock to feed on, and is an important contributant to erosion.

It is not difficult to see what is meant when it is said that the spread of education will solve many of these problems, for the more one examines them, the more one comes to see that basically they are problems of tradition, and as urban society shows, where education takes root, tradition falls away. It is again a question of that transposition from an old way of life to a new one.

It is a challenge, nonetheless – as indeed the Basotho would wish it to be.

And how the old life is enshrined in music and song! – the plaintive songs of the herdboys, the wistful longing of the songs of the lodge, the haunting nostalgia of the songs of the mines. As Mr. J. P. Mohapeloa, Basutoland's leading composer, has it in the words of one of his choral songs:*

'Come, whirlwind,† waft me on high!
Let them suddenly see me arrive
As they sit in quiet discussion,
Speaking of the harvest that promises plenty.
Ever I dream of going home by rail,
The examiner shouting "Tickets! Tickets!"‡
If I had the wings of an eagle,
To Lesotho direct I would fly.
Come, whirlwind, waft me on high!'

*This free translation of the poem was worked out in conjunction with the composer.

†The implication of the word whirlwind here is the railway.

‡These two words are in English in the original.

14. MEDICINE MURDER

FROM their first days in the country, in the last century, the missionaries knew of the importance which medicine played in the life of the tribe, and of the tribal doctors' functions in this regard. They were also fortunate that Moshesh shared the views of Mohlomi on these matters, on one occasion, when the doctors claimed to possess a medicine for invulnerability, telling them to take it themselves and lead the soldiers into battle. The missionaries also learned that the Basotho took flesh from their victims killed in battle, and used it as medicine for their chiefs' horns. On one occasion they dealt with the body of a British soldier in this way, and it appears to have been the French Protestant missionaries who disabused the Basotho of their then prevalent belief that European blood and flesh were stronger than African, a piece of persuasion for which a century of Europeans in Basutoland may well thank their lucky stars. As they extended their researches, the missionaries came to know of the alternative practice whereby in times of peace a victim could be selected from the tribe to provide medicine.

Wars ended and peace came, and that was all the missionaries or anyone else knew. Schools and churches rose, education spread, modern medicine arrived; the whole aspect of the country was one of slow and steady improvement. From the turn of the century till well into the 1930s every published account which goes into any detail concerning the life of the Basotho reflects the satisfactory progress of civilization among a people whose more savage customs could increasingly and happily be called things of the past.

From the earliest days of the Cape administration, government grew up on a peripheral basis, the early administrators establishing their camps at points situated only a few miles inward from the Orange Free State border, forming a broad semi-circle round the country, and being as it were the starting-points from which administration penetrated inward. These places grew into Basutoland's main towns, still sometimes called camps, each of them having a corresponding town on the Free State side,

enjoying close commercial contacts with its Basutoland opposite number. Thus, beginning at the northern point of the semi-circle, Butha Buthe in Basutoland dealt with Fouriesbourg in the Free State, Leribe and Teyateyaneng dealt with Ficksburg, Maseru with Ladybrand, Mafeteng with Wepener, Mohale's Hoek and Quthing with Zastron, and Qacha's Nek, the most remote, with Matatiele in Cape Province. For a British administrator of those days, duty lay before him in the interior, leisure close behind him over the border. The entire feel of administration was of being on the outside looking in.

When in 1872 the Basutoland Mounted Police was formed, it too followed this overall pattern of approach, which the introduction of indirect rule through chiefs in 1884 if anything confirmed, the force operating on the basis that its members only penetrated into the interior at the request of a chief. If for any other reason a police officer was obliged to make a journey inward, his first duty was to report to the chief of the area, who provided him with a messenger to accompany him during the course of his investigation.

From time to time on these interior journeys, police officers saw and reported what they were told were – and which in general they assumed to be – cases of accidental death in rugged and difficult parts of the country. The body would be lying at the foot of a cliff, or in a shallow river at the bottom of a ravine. When the officer asked what had happened, he was invariably assured that the person had accidentally fallen off the cliff, or slipped off the edge of the ravine and been drowned in the river. The Basotho accompanying the officer usually knew about the accident, and there was no suggestion of foul play. To have investigated such a case in the conditions of the country would have taken several hours of descent and ascent; the officer was usually pressed for time, having to reach a village before sundown; and being so convincingly and generally assured that the death was accidental, he passed on his way. The fact that in no such case discovered was there ever any subsequent allegation of violence seemed to confirm that these were, as people said, accidents.

As the years passed, the similarity of these accidents led a number of police officers to suspect that they were not quite what they appeared to be. In every instance there was the same element of doubt in the mind of the officer making the discovery. Why

should a person have slipped from such a cliff, at night presumably, or when drunk? What would any such person be doing, particularly at night and even drunk, walking in such a lonely place?

Investigations were resorted to, but revealed nothing. Nearly always the bodies were found in rivers, and in an advanced state of decomposition. Nor was there ever a word, even a hint, of complaint from among the people; always came the same local assurances. Yet the more familiar the police became with these discoveries, the more sinister seemed their apparent conformity to a pattern.

By the 1930s there was an element of opinion in the police force which was restive with the continued restrictions on interior movement. In 1935 the Pim Commission, in its report on the territory, commented adversely on the restrictions as hindering the proper maintenance of order, but no government action was taken. Thus matters continued till 1942, when evidence in the hands of the police indicated the existence of a secret ritual cult of murder, of which the bodies discovered exposed in rivers were the victims.

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The police now knew they were dealing with murder; their difficulty was to bring a proven case of it. The task of initially reporting a death was the responsibility of chiefs. Any investigation into the causes of death was carried out by a solitary policeman unable to act independently of the chief's messenger and others accompanying him. *Post mortem* examination could only be conducted at Maseru and one or two other towns, to which transporting a dead body presented serious difficulties. Invariably the deaths bore every appearance of being accidental; invariably there was unanimous insistence that they were so. The policeman was left with little alternative to agreeing with local opinion, and the body was duly buried.

As the completing touch to the problem facing the police, further knowledge of these murders indicated that in almost every case the principal offender or instigator was a chief or headman, the very person whose responsibility it was to report suspected murders.

Drawing aside the veil for a moment, various factors were operating during these years to send up the number of murders

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perpetrated. Since the days of Moshesh, the practice whereby chiefs 'placed' their sons had continued largely unchecked, resulting in a proliferation of chiefs and sub-chiefs, many of them with little security of tenure. In 1938 a limitation was imposed on the number of chiefs and headmen recognized by government, and in 1943 measures were taken to modernize the administration by reducing Basotho courts to one-tenth of their number (from 1,300 to 130) and reorganizing them. Chiefs would no longer be empowered to hold their own courts and pocket the fines. Instead they would be paid salaries from a National Treasury, to which fines imposed in the Basotho courts were to be paid. The Treasury and the new measures came into force in 1946.

Remembering what we examined in an earlier chapter concerning medicine and the necessity for it to increase man's power to act as an individual, it can be seen at once that these well-intended government measures had the effect of diminishing the power of a chief's shadow. In any case, it was thus that they were interpreted in the villages. From end to end of Basutoland, chiefs felt the need for medicine to strengthen the waning power of their shadows – medicine to increase *seriti*, the shadow of a person, which required human flesh.

Toward the end of 1947 the Commissioner of Police made strong recommendations to government that the restrictions on police movement be eliminated, naming as a particular reason the need to deal effectively with murder. The paramount ruler of the Basotho at this juncture was a woman, the Regent 'Mantsebo, widow of the former Paramount Chief Seeiso (reigned 1939–40). To her the British authorities made it clear that the police were of the opinion that chiefs were mainly responsible for the evident increase in the number of murders. The Regent was a Roman Catholic, and she appears to have been unaware of the extent of medicine murder at the time, a not unlikely situation. To clear the good name of her chiefs she gave consent to police movement without escort, informing all chiefs accordingly.

In January 1948, at the earliest moment, the police adopted the new procedure, and by the end of the year had uncovered 20 cases of medicine murder, compared with the six suspected cases of the year before. Of these 20 cases the most significant

involved the Regent's brother-in-law – son of Paramount Chief Griffith (reigned 1913–39) – and his third cousin, another important chief of the House of Moshesh. These two, among others, were tried, found guilty of murder, condemned to death, and executed in 1949.

Medicine murder could scarcely have made its appearance before the civilized world in a more spectacular manner – and the civilized world, be it remembered, included a large number of educated Basotho, those excluded from the secret life of the tribe. Their reaction was perhaps the most complex of all. They were shocked, as would any civilized person be, by this revelation of the ghastly things going on in their midst; but they found it difficult to be grateful to those who had revealed them. They accepted the fact that under Christian law, to which they themselves adhered, such deeds could only be classed as murder; but they resented the lifting of silence from over these horrors stemming from their own past. It is a reaction to be found today when medicine murder is publicly discussed – a reaction which, though one may grow impatient with it, one can sympathize with. The transposition from the old life to the new has its uneasy moments.

In the village there was shock of a different kind. People had always known that the benign and tolerant British administration possessed claws; they had been wary of those claws. But so far they had seen for themselves that the claws had only been used in cases of commonly agreed wrongdoing. Medicine murder was another matter. It was commonly accepted by all save those belonging to chiefly families that medicine murder was a fearful thing. Everyone knew the fear that descended over a village when the time drew near for a chief's son to be 'placed', when a nocturnal knock at the door of a hut could mean that one of those within was the selected victim. But this fearful thing was necessary for the good of the tribe, the chief, the village. It had always been thus, and the coming of British government had made no difference. Now, suddenly and inexplicably, that government had struck at the source of wellbeing, had shown itself inimical to the inmost ideas of the people, inimical to the medicine without which chief and people were powerless and in the dark. It was a shattering, unforeseeable development, leaving the people uncertain of all around them, as people are in the midst of an earthquake, when what was thought sure reveals itself as unsure.

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This reaction provides a clue to the complex moral problems which have ever since surrounded medicine murder, its detection and prosecution. In the months following the execution of the two senior chiefs there was a marked fall-off in the number of reported cases, but by 1952 these had again risen, and have since continued at a rate which over the past ten years gives an average of 8.4 detected murders per year, or one every six weeks. In 1949 the British Government commissioned Mr. G. I. Jones, Lecturer in Anthropology at Cambridge University, to investigate the nature, significance, and causes of medicine murder, and Mr. Jones' report, laid before Parliament in April 1951, provided an invaluable background to an understanding of the cult, and of the beliefs and mentality that go with it. More than a decade of medicine murder trials has added still further to knowledge on the subject.

* * *

Medicine murder, as committed upon a member of the tribe, is surrounded by secrecy which has a definite psychic purpose bearing on the efficacy of the medicine. At the present time an additional reason for secrecy is to shield the act from police vigilance. Again for psychic reasons, murder is done at night, the time when malignant spirits exercise power.

The suggestion for murder is usually made in private conclave between a chief and a tribal doctor. The suggestion that the chief needs medicine to increase the power of his *seriti* may come from either side, but the responsibility for the decision is the chief's. Once this decision is made, the tribal doctor advises, on the basis of the chief's particular needs, whether the victim should be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, and specifies the parts of the body which he will need to make the medicine. In all cases, even when the specified parts only require superficial wounds, death must occur. For the medicine to have power, those who obtain it must be linked in a secret and ultimate act of evil.

The chief then selects his victim, usually in consultation with the tribal doctor. Due to the psychic need for secrecy, after as well as before the event, everything must be done to give the appearance of accidental death. People with regular habits, whose absence would be quickly remarked and cause comment, are avoided as victims. The chosen will preferably be one who comes and goes at his own choosing, in whom a three-day ab-

sence would not give rise to anxiety. Thus men and women addicted to drunkenness, who wander about and sleep in other villages, or girls who sometimes stay with relatives elsewhere, or widows living alone, or men shunned by others and who will not be missed, are often chosen. The commonest victims are drinkers.

The victim having been chosen, the chief calls for between 16 and 20 (the numbers vary greatly according to circumstances) of his most trusted men. To these he announces his decision, swearing them to absolute secrecy, and commanding them to do the murder for him. In the event of the chosen victim being a woman, it may be arranged that one or two women be made party to the secret, in order to add naturalness to the manner of the *enlèvement*.

In the case described by Mr. Jones in the body of his report, and which is a typical case, the chief involved was a woman. There was a wedding feast in the village, and Mochesela, the selected victim for the chief's medicine horn, was drinking beer in a hut with Dané, one of those in the secret. When all was ready, one of the others in the secret drew near the hut as a sign to Dané, who rose and said to Mochesela:

“Cousin, let us go outside for a while.”

Mochesela followed him to where 16 men were waiting for them with the Chieftainess and two of her women attendants. She greeted Dané, reminded him that he had already had her orders, and told the men to seize Mochesela. As one of them caught hold of him, Mochesela cried out: “My father Pholo, are you going to kill me?” and when he did not reply, continued: “Let me free and I will give you my black ox”. “I am not your father, and I want you, not your ox”, replied Pholo.

Mochesela offered resistance. He was overpowered, gagged, and borne away to a place some distance from the village, from which his cries would not be heard. There the men removed their blankets, stripped Mochesela, and held him naked on the ground.

An oil lamp was produced, and by its light they proceeded to cut small circular pieces of skin from his body with a knife. Pholo cut a piece from the calf of his left leg, another man a piece from his groin, another man a piece from beneath his right breast, a fourth from the biceps of his right arm. The pieces as they were cut were laid on a white cloth in front of Mosala the native doctor who was going to make the medicine, and one of the men held a billy-can to collect the blood from these and later wounds. Then Dané took the knife and with it removed the entire face of Mochesela. He cut right down to the bone, beginning at the forehead

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and ending at the throat, and he finished by taking out the throat, the tongue and the eyes. Mochesela died while his throat was cut. The Chieftainess, who had stood by watching, is then reported to have said: "I thank you, my children, for having killed this man for me. I know the Police will come here to investigate this matter, and no one must tell them about it. If they do, I will kill them in the same way as I have killed Mochesela".'

Ordering that the body be hidden for three days in a hut, she returned home with her two attendants, followed by the doctor and another man carrying the billy-can and the pieces of flesh. On the third night following, the body of Mochesela was carried

'to some low cliffs near the village, and after some of the clothing had been placed on the grass and on a tree nearby, it was thrown over and then dragged a little further downhill, to be found there the following morning.'

The discovery of the body – another essential feature – completes the psychic process of giving power to the act and to the medicine derived from it. Discovery sets the seal on secrecy. A villager finds the body by chance, calls to others, the shout goes up, and in a moment the body is surrounded by onlookers. A Basotho saying has it: as people will gather round the corpse, so will they gather round him who has the medicine. But some will prefer the shrewd words of one of Basutoland's most discerning Roman Catholic priests, who gave me this simpler explanation: 'The Devil would not ask them to do anything that was too easy'.

In a murder in which I attended part of the judicial investigation the victim was a woman. She was from another village, and a woman who was her friend in the village where the medicine was required was ordered to send a message asking the victim to come and see her with the object of admiring a newborn grandson. The woman was warned that if she refused to send the message she would herself be the victim. In this case the murder was committed by 17 men, and they had a torch. A gash was made at the side of the woman's neck, and the blood drained off into a billy-can. Further mutilations were inflicted, in the course of which she died. Her entrails were then removed and handed to the three women present, who were told to take them to the river and wash them. Afterwards one of the men passed the can of blood to the women, saying, 'Drink some; it will give you courage', and they all took a sip. The victim's friend, a Christian, became an accomplice witness.

For the police and the judiciary these murders present problems of peculiar difficulty. The same wall of silence we encountered around circumcision surrounds medicine murder. In instances like the one just related, where the wall of silence breaks, the court is faced with the problems ever attendant on the evidence of accomplices, while the police seldom fail to be accused of having obtained confessions under duress. Men who have taken part in such murders generally maintain complete secrecy, at their trial and for the rest of their lives, answering with steadfast denial the most incriminating evidence, and giving a defence lawyer an almost impossible task. Forensic detection is rendered difficult by the fact that the corpses are often found in water, where the activities of river crabs and other animals that feed on corpses make it hard to establish to a court's satisfaction the existence of *ante mortem* wounds. A further complication arose in the recent case of two men who, returning to the mines, met an enemy of theirs in a lonely place, killed and robbed him, afterwards cutting pieces out of his body and leaving it at the foot of a cliff, giving every indication of a medicine murder and bringing untold trouble to the people of a nearby village, who only with the greatest difficulty managed to establish their innocence.

At a medicine murder trial, with perhaps 20 accused, every one of whom may have taken part in the deed but not all to the same extent, a judge faces unique difficulties in distinguishing between murderers and accomplices. He also faces the now patently proven fact that the death sentence is not a deterrent to medicine murder. He may also be aware of the fact that the chief who has ordered the murder, and on whom the police can pin nothing, has arranged for one of the accused to turn accomplice witness and incriminate another of the accused as being the man requiring the medicine, thereby, with the agreement of all, shielding the real culprit, who is not even in court. The selection of murder victims seldom gives any cause to suspect motives of hatred or revenge, while a glance at the accused in the dock reveals a total absence of disquiet, or indeed of consciousness of having done anything wrong. In the case I witnessed, the 19 accused sat there quietly in the charge of one policeman, whom they could have overpowered in less than a minute, and when evidence concerning various village scandals came up, the accused could be observed glancing at one another and smiling.

The term 'medicine murder' was coined by Mr. G. I. Jones as a means of avoiding the earlier-used term 'ritual murder'. 'This term "ritual"', Mr. Jones explained in his report, 'which implies the taking of a human life for religious purposes or in accordance with a religious or magic rite, is not a particularly happy one, for there is no such element of human sacrifice in these Basutoland murders. They are not committed from any religious motives, but for the purely material objective' of obtaining medicine; and Mr. Jones unchallengeably ascribed the primary cause of these murders to 'the general belief of the Basuto and other South African Bantu in the efficacy of magical concoctions, usually termed "medicines"'.

The fact remains, however, that 'the purely material objective' is achieved by means of a pattern of fulfilment in which every detail is dictated by psychic, non-material factors. It was these which, in the prehistory of the Basotho, dominated that part of life which for want of a better word may be called religious, in that it concerned the relation between men and spirits. As a description of medicine murder shows, these psychic factors produce a highly formalized outcome. What faces us, in other words, is not an emotional, unformed, and possibly nostalgic belief in a spirit world, but something infinitely stronger and more insidious. To use the term employed by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Maseru, the Most Reverend Emmanuel 'Mabathoana, we are dealing here with a *doctrine*.

At this point, and remembering the secrecy that surrounds both cults, let us take another look at the circumcision lodge. The boys at a lodge, it will be remembered, are anointed on various occasions with medicine. The composition of a lodge in its classic form is built up round the person of a chief's son, whose lodge companions, bound to him in loyalty and comradeship, will be the henchmen who will accompany and serve him when the time comes for him to be 'placed'. It is they who in later years will obey his secret orders when he needs medicine for *seriti*.

The lodge being a prelude to a chief's son acquiring independent status, the medicine used in anointing him and his fellows must contain human flesh. The circumcision lodge, by its very existence, presupposes the carrying out of a medicine murder. It stands as the determining point at which a man enters the world of tradition. These days lodges are often formed without a chief's

son, and less powerful medicine is used, not necessarily containing human flesh. Such medicine, however, is only a substitute for the real thing, and its use does not detract from the underlying principle of a lodge, which fills the purpose of baptism into a doctrine which is the opposite of all enlightenment.

It is at this juncture that one comes to perceive the nature of what I have described here as the transposition. As a dinner with African friends in Maseru showed, there was no choice of cultures. What life presented was a clean break. Observing the underlying nature of ritual circumcision, with which the old traditional life is unfortunately bound up, the reason *why* there was no alternative to a clean break becomes plainer, and deeper too grows the understanding of the loneliness, the silent struggle, of the educated. With the knowledge of the life of the villages and hills behind them, they are brave indeed who stand in loneliness with the courage of their convictions.

NOTE—It is sometimes claimed that medicine murder, in the form described here, is of comparatively recent (post-1868) origin, being a peacetime perversion of the earlier practice of taking flesh from enemies fallen in war. Mohlomi's advice to Moshesh, cited by Ellenberger and Macgregor, and dated 1811 – never to order death at the behest of a tribal doctor – suggests that this is incorrect. It is difficult to interpret Mohlomi's words other than as a reference to medicine murder, which is thus seen to have existed in his day, a hundred years and more prior to 1868. It is particularly interesting that these words of his should have been recorded by Ellenberger and Macgregor, neither of whom presumably had any idea of their significance to the times in which they were writing. To this evidence it should be added that the formalized pattern of medicine murder has nothing in it suggestive of recent origin. To the early missionaries it was explained as an alternative method of obtaining medicine in times of peace, the inference at that date being that it was rare. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this was a deception, one of the many that surround the subject, due to the understandable sensitiveness of the Basotho to discussion of it. If Ellenberger's record of Mohlomi's words can be accepted as accurate – and accuracy was the aim of the early Protestant missionaries in their endeavours to establish the history of the Basotho – it seems fairly safe to assume that medicine murder is of prehistoric origin, flesh thus obtained being the most powerful of all medicines. In this case it would appear to follow that flesh taken from a fallen enemy was a medicine of lesser strength, not having the extra power conferred on it by corporate secrecy in the performance of an act of murder.

15. THE RIVAL DOCTRINE

THE closer one looks at country life in Basutoland, the plainer it becomes that the transposition demanded of literate men and women – a transposition which has been going on for a century, and which is still going on – is not simply the relinquishment of an old way of life and its replacement by a new. *Au fond* it is a change from a pagan to a Christian society, a social revolution in which inevitably the Churches are in a position of the greatest significance.

The Churches have for a considerable time played an extremely important part in the life of Basutoland. Ninety per cent of the country's education is in their hands; they run hospitals, train priests, teachers, and nurses, operate printing presses and publish newspapers, and exercise a profound influence on the social life of the educated Basotho. They are in addition the foremost patrons of music and literature; all that Basutoland has of intellectual life she owes in origin to them.

The Missions Evangéliques, established at Morija in 1833, were the pioneers of Christianity, which with their guidance developed on a social pattern singularly adapted to the Basotho temperament, and to which may perhaps be mainly attributed the present depth of the mission's roots in the country. Fundamental in this stand Eugène Casalis' words, 'We are Basotho'. At Morija the three young Frenchmen sat down and founded a village, much as any Basotho moving to a new place would have done. A community, of which they were an integral part, grew around them, and as they extended their activities in other places, the same pattern was followed.

There was no organizational separateness about the Missions Evangéliques. Their leaders were teachers and evangelists, but socially they were part of Basutoland, sharing the life around them, exactly as they would have done in France or Switzerland. Knowing that the number of European missionaries would, with limited financial resources from Paris, always be few, they made Basotho participation in the work of the mission a cardinal aim.

In an amazingly short time they had trained Basotho teacher-evangelists conducting small churches and schools over a wide area, sitting down among the people as their French instructors had sat down at Morija, creating round them a Christian community, in which the aim of participation was further extended.

Participation – the indivisibility of the Missions Évangéliques and the modern evolution of Basutoland was born of this policy – was rendered particularly real by the fact that the French mission had no hierarchy. Church matters were settled in committee, and once a Mosotho became a Christian he found he had a voice in Christian affairs, either an indirect voice to one of the members of the committee, or, if he became an evangelist or otherwise prominent in work for the Church, a direct voice which was the equal of all other direct voices. In a race among whom nothing new is acceptable until it has run the gauntlet of debate, this system helped to make Christianity initially and continually acceptable. It made it, in Basotho terms, a reality; and from the Christian point of view, it brought every Christian at baptism within the fold of Christian responsibility. The Church belonged to the Basotho people, as it has continued to belong ever since. When we remember the Basotho land tenure system, it can be seen how aptly a Church of which membership implied communal ownership met and responded to Basotho ideas.

On the European side, the Church went even further towards local identification by being a family affair. The missionaries brought their wives with them and made Basutoland their home. Their sons, educated in Africa, continued their fathers' work. The European element in the mission did not depend on men sent from afar, who in their maturer years would return to a distant home. Like the Basotho evangelists, the Europeans in the Church were born and bred in Basutoland, speaking Sesotho from childhood, and sharing in the life around them. Newcomers arriving from Europe as often as not strengthened this tradition. As in every stable community, those in positions of responsibility bred their successors, the Europeans no less than the Basotho. When one first arrives in Basutoland, one is astonished to find how few are the European names associated with the Paris mission. Delving further, one is equally astonished to find that

many of these names are not those of single individuals, but of families, and that each generation has made important and individual contributions to the life and wellbeing of the Basotho people.

In 1862, after ten fruitless years spent in an endeavour to bring Christianity to the Zulu of Natal, the first two Roman Catholic priests came to Basutoland in search of a people more receptive to their ideas. They were Bishop Jean-François Allard and Father Joseph Gérard, both of the Congregation of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a group formed in Provence by Eugène de Mazenod (1782–1861), and which received its name and papal approval in 1826.

Moshesh, in his 70s and engaged in his long struggle with the Boers, welcomed the two priests, observing to those who questioned his decision that churches were like doctors: it was best to consult more than one. The Catholics established themselves at Tloutlé, situated in a sheltered valley 15 miles from Maseru and some 17 miles as the crow flies from the Protestant mission at Morija. At Tloutlé, under the guidance of Father Gérard, the settlement of Roma developed, today the largest Roman Catholic centre in southern Africa.

The Roman Catholics, being celibates, were not in the same favourable position as the French Protestants of being able to settle with their families among the Basotho and raise children to continue their work. In this sense they were more dependent than were the Protestants on outside sources of help, and these for a long time were gravely restricted. In 1865 Father Gérard was joined by another pioneer figure in the history of the Catholic mission, Father François Le Bihan, who came accompanied by six Sisters of the Holy Family, from Bordeaux, assigned to work among Basotho women. But progress was extremely slow. In 1862, when the Catholics arrived, the Protestants already had over 50 schools. By 1901 the Catholics had only 12, none of them outside central mission stations.

With the Roman Catholics, too, came Roman ideas – of centrality, of property. As a Mosotho rightly pointed out to me, even today, in the landscape of Basutoland, you can spot from miles off a Catholic mission by the fact that it is boundaried within its own compound, separate from the neighbouring village. The Catholic mission is deeply associated today with the life of

Basutoland, but not in the same simple, family way which has proved to be the strength of the Protestants.

After the First World War the Oblates of Basutoland, dependent hitherto on France for their missionary strength, appealed for assistance from the provinces of their Congregation in Belgium and Canada. In 1924 the first Belgian and Canadian Fathers arrived, and the Catholic Church moved into an epoch of rapid expansion. A seminary was founded for training Basotho clergy – Roman centralism, as much as shortage of funds, had till then blocked this development – and when in 1930 the Vicariate was transferred to the Eastern Province of Canada, resulting in the Catholic mission today being mainly a Mosotho and French Canadian one, the number of Basotho Catholics stood at 60,000.

Since then the Roman Catholic Church has overtaken the French Protestants considerably in numbers, and overwhelmingly in the extent of its external financial resources. In 1945 the Canadian Oblates at Roma founded Pius XII College, which developed rapidly, and after 1954 dramatically, into the foremost educational institution in the country, heading clearly towards becoming a Catholic university.

A combination of circumstances at the eleventh hour prevented this *coup de grâce*. The very success of the college had by 1962 caused its growth to outstrip its funds, threatening a deterioration in scholastic standards, while South Africa's policy of *apartheid* had closed many of the traditional African avenues to higher education, not only for people in Basutoland, but in Bechuanaland and Swaziland as well, creating an urgent need for a group alternative far more costly than any mission could contemplate. The foreseen happened: Pius XII College became a university. The unforeseeable intervened, preventing its becoming a Catholic one. On 1st January 1964, at Roma, the seat of Catholic learning and endeavour, and with certain Catholic safeguards which it is surprising to find were accepted, there came into existence the non-denominational University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, known as U.B.B.S.

The Roman Catholic Church stands forth today as the most powerful Christian force in Basutoland. The census of 1956 gave a return of 33 per cent Catholics, as against 21 per cent French Protestants, 9 per cent Anglicans, and 5 per cent other Christians.

Since then the figures have undoubtedly altered in the Roman Catholic favour. Nonetheless the Roman Catholic Church has its problems. With the greatest numbers and the greatest resources, upon it devolves the greatest responsibility in the deeper struggle. It is relevant in this context that among convicted medicine murderers who are baptized Christians, a very distinct majority are Roman Catholics.

Moshesh's idea regarding different religious denominations was that the more varieties that came in, the greater would be the power of Jehovah to protect him and his people from – well, at that time – Boers. With the Dutch Reformed Church in mind, Moshesh's idea presented Jehovah with some imponderables, one of which he apparently sought to solve by sending in the Church of England (1850). He might have known better. Robert Gray, the first Anglican Bishop of Cape Town, passing in a cart along the Basutoland frontier on his way to Natal, found he had no time to accede to Moshesh's request for a meeting, and anyway had no money to start a mission. Not till a generation later, in 1876, did the Anglican Church make a modest beginning at Leribe and Mohale's Hoek, from which, always with severe financial difficulties, they gradually extended. There is today a small Anglican pro-cathedral in Maseru, and the Church runs some of the best schools in the country. The mission is Anglo-Catholic, its European personnel including monks from Kelham, Nottinghamshire. Like the French Protestants, the Anglicans, with extremely limited outside sources of money, have striven to make their Church self-supporting, but it remains the poorest of the three principal Churches.

There are other denominations represented in Basutoland, making valuable contributions in the fields of medicine and education, but their numbers are not sufficient to influence the issues involved in dealing with African tradition. Here the main protagonists are the French Protestants and the Roman Catholics – two Churches profoundly different in character.

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For various reasons, one of which was the inevitable financial one, the Société des Missions Evangéliques in Paris no longer directly controls the French Protestant Church, which since 1964 has become the established Church of Basutoland. This measure has given it locally a surer future, but the sad fact remains that

this Church, so profoundly part of Basutoland history and civilized development, is no longer an expanding force, and has lost some of its former militancy. Though smaller in numbers than the Roman Church, it nonetheless remains intellectually the most significant of the Churches, its members including a high percentage of the country's leading civil servants, politicians, teachers, and – very important – women active in welfare and education. The character of its services is of people gathered together to praise God, to pray (but not on one's knees), and to sing. Music has from the beginning been a great feature in the mission's aim of communal participation, and choirs have filled a useful social purpose in making small-town and even village life revolve round Christian affairs. The Church of Basutoland is essentially a corporate community, and in the words of a leading European educationist, through church and school it 'breeds a sturdy independence of thought' – surely its greatest strength in respect of its own future.

The early French Protestant missionaries adopted a line of complete opposition to the African doctrine with which, without realizing it was a doctrine, they found themselves confronted. With the horrors of the Lifaqane (see Chapter 4) imminent in everyone's minds, the evangelists were left in no doubt of the tragic and hideous backgrounds of many of their early converts. They were at the same time deeply impressed by the high qualities and character of the Basotho people. They saw that these naturally endowed qualities could flourish only where people were freed from the fear out of which grew evil necessity, and that an African, on becoming a Christian, must for his or her own good make as complete a break as was socially possible from things pertaining to the world of spirits and medicine, where lay the vital organs of fear. Two of the things they opposed were the bride-gift of cattle and the circumcision lodge. Regarding the first, they rightly saw that as long as a bride-gift of cattle was made, the gift and not the vows before God would solemnize the marriage. Regarding the second, they recognized the lodge as a brutalizing and degrading force. It was forbidden to Christians to marry or circumcize their sons in these ways. Among discerning Basotho Protestants today it is unhesitatingly admitted that these prohibitions were right.

The first Roman Catholic missionaries originally shared much

the same views, but their attempts at conversion met with considerable opposition. As an approved Catholic document unambiguously states: ' . . . the Basotho were in no hurry to abandon their paganism. What held them back was polygamy, drink, pagan feasts, and Protestant propaganda'.

The French Protestants made no specific attempts to convert chiefs, among whom the practice of polygamy – and in Mohlomi's advice to Moshesh we have observed that this had its uses – presented difficulties not easily solved. Instead they sought to build up a Christian community among ordinary folk, which as it grew would eliminate polygamy gradually and naturally.

The Roman Catholics, aware that the opposition they encountered was in part due to the known prohibitions laid down by the Protestants on anyone becoming a Christian, eventually concluded that certain accommodations were required. Their centralist ideas, and their great experience in other countries, led them to believe that the conversion of chiefs would lead to the mass conversion of their followers; and by evolving a legalism which permitted a polygamist to be baptized on the understanding that thenceforth he recognized only his first wife (and if this wife had no son there was sometimes a further modification), they pursued a policy which over the years led to many thousands of conversions – during a period when French Protestantism was looked upon virtually as the state religion – and which in 1915 achieved its most spectacular success with the conversion of Paramount Chief Griffith.

The Catholics furthermore came to entertain doubts about the wisdom of prohibiting the bride-gift. As they came more deeply in touch with village life, they grew aware that a girl, whether Christian or not, was not considered to have been properly married without a bride-gift. It was a question of status. Marriage without a bride-gift was a cheap marriage; it had a hole-in-the-corner touch about it. The Catholics resolved that provided it was made absolutely clear that marriage was not marriage unless made in church, there need be no objection to the customary exchange of cattle.

The effect of this accommodation on prospective Basotho Christians, faced with one Church which forbade the exchange of cattle (which everyone *knew* signified marriage) and another which permitted it, needs no explanation. It led to a situation in

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which the French Protestant Church, if it was not to lose adherents, had to turn a blind eye to cattle exchange, leading in due course to the contemporary situation throughout Basutoland, where, despite anything Basotho Christians may tell their priests, outside the main towns a marriage between Christians is deemed to have taken place on the day the cattle are exchanged, regardless of the day of the church ceremony.

This policy of accommodation, coupled with the unusual conditions of Basutoland village life, has produced from the Christian viewpoint an unsatisfactory state of affairs, of which the following story, taken from an Anglican casebook, serves as a fair example.

A baptized Christian man wished to take a wife before leaving for the mines. The usual marriage feast took place after an exchange of cattle, but before there was time for a church ceremony the man had to leave for Johannesburg. A baby was in due course



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born and, after the circumstances had been explained to the priest, was baptized. After two and a half years the husband came back from the mines for a few days, and suspecting that his wife had a lover, did not return to his village, meeting his wife solely in Maseru. That the wife had a 'friend' was well-known in the village, but this, in a country where most able-bodied men are absent for years on end, is an accepted institution and, provided no babies arrive at the wrong time, nothing is said about it.

When, nine months after the husband's visit to Maseru, the wife had a second baby, it was duly baptized. Two and a half years later the same thing happened. A year after the birth of the third baby, however, during which time the husband had been nowhere near Basutoland, the wife had a fourth, again baptized. When the husband learned of this, he asked for the return of his cows, signifying divorce. The Church thus found itself responsible for dealing with the problems of a broken home, nominally Christian, yet one which had been made and broken according to principles which had nothing whatever to do with Christianity.

It is in the light of circumstances such as these that one must view the findings of the 1956 census that only 29 per cent of the population are still pagan. The story also shows indirectly the problems created when religious denominations contend, when it is a choice between increasing your numbers or being submerged. Many Christians do not necessarily make a Christian society. Far more than great numbers of baptisms and converts, the country needs small, firm community foundations. As the Basotho saying runs, a bird builds its nest twig by twig.

* * *

Before the doctrinal significance of the circumcision lodge was known, which was only recently, it was its disrupting influence on school life which particularly bothered the authorities. A government ruling laid it down that no boys' lodge might be held less than three miles from a school. Girls' lodges – for there are female initiation lodges as well – were traditionally nearer to villages, but every effort was made to keep them as far off as possible. In the past decade there has been a marked increase in the number of lodges, which every year have been creeping nearer to schools. Today it is not unusual to find a school and a lodge on the same hillside, less than half a mile distant from each other. The school attendance records tell their own story.

The Roman Catholic Church has recently formulated rules for re-admission of initiates to schools. These came into force in 1964, and constitute a determined step in the conflict between the rival doctrines claiming control over the minds and hearts of Basutoland. From now on no girl initiate may under any circumstances be re-admitted to a Catholic school. In the case of boys, where there are clear indications that a boy attended a lodge against his will, and if he promises not to speak of the lodge to other children, an initiate may be re-admitted to school life, but in a school where he is not known to the other children, and never to the school he was in formerly. Initiates may then be admitted only as dayboys, never as boarders. These measures present such obstacles in country areas, where circumcision is most prevalent, that in effect, except to the most determined, they deny further education to any boy foolish enough to join a lodge.

This brings official Catholic Church policy into line with that unofficially pursued at all times by a handful of hard-core priests, lonely men in far-off villages, acting as conscience and understanding seemed to dictate, without clear official support. In all the Churches there are similar experiences. An African priest of the Anglican Church explained to me how wherever he has been – and his has been a life of long experience – he has warned parents and children, from the pulpit and in visits to their homes, that anyone, in whatever circumstances, who goes to a lodge will be cast out from Christian life, from church and school. Any boy who is under duress is encouraged to report the fact at once. If any boy, after these warnings, joins a lodge he subsequently finds himself indeed cast out.

As my priest friend explained it, 'There are many wrongs a man can commit, and afterwards say "I repent, and I will not do it again"'. The lodge is not in this category. Joining the lodge is an irrevocable act. There is no saying "I will not do it again". It has already been done, once and for life. That boy has received Christian baptism, but has repudiated it, and instead chosen baptism into evil. I am a busy man, with the problems of hundreds of people to attend to. I have no alternative to regarding such a man as a lost soul.'

These are grave and terrible words, reminiscent more of the twelfth century than the twentieth. But this is a twelfth-century

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problem. I came away from Basutoland with the feeling that this African was the bravest of all the priests I had met – and there are many brave missionaries, men and women, in that country – looking forthrightly at evil and recognizing it for what it is, in an age all too ready to say that it is not entirely evil, or that its original intention was good, or that one should look for the economic reasons behind it, which is just the attitude of approach which most suits the devil's purpose.

I asked if the Archdeacon in Maseru was in agreement with this firm and uncompromising policy. 'The Archdeacon', my friend replied with a smile, 'lives in a town. He is not faced with the problem.'



16. POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT

THE story of Basutoland since 1833 can be expressed in terms of two profound transformations: morally and socially, the shift from a pagan to a Christian society, which is like a lamp gradually and increasingly shedding light over an area of darkness; and politically, the transformation of a tribe into a modern state, a process to which the social and moral transformation greatly contributes, the two forms of change being perhaps indivisible.

In the social and moral transformation, the Churches have played the principal part, and it is their work, due to its consistency and long continuity, which has laid the deepest roots. But no less important at the present time is the part which government has played in the transformation from tribe to state.

When one first studies the history of Basutoland, and examines the problems and difficulties of the country, one is apt to say that Britain's contribution to Basutoland, particularly during the period of what we have called minimal government, is a record of neglect. Yet in general it was not thus that it appeared to the people of those times, either to European or African. At the time there was much truth in Moshesh's words that modern laws and government would be a stone too heavy for the people to carry. For a long time after those words were said, political development – the participation of Basotho in government, even the formulation of policies and plans for improving the lot of the people – was a question of patience, waiting for the moment when the people, or at any rate their leaders, felt a need for change.

The first seed of modern political development may be said to have been planted in 1903, with the formation of the Basutoland Council, an advisory body consisting of 100 Basotho members, of whom 94 were nominated by the Paramount Chief, five by the Resident Commissioner, and with the Paramount Chief himself as Chief Councillor. This body, which was given statutory recognition in 1910, exercised a decisive influence on much that concerned the tribal life of the people, including the defining of tribal laws. In practice a good deal of other draft legislation was

submitted to it for discussion, and in 1944 it became an item of policy that legislation affecting the domestic affairs and welfare of the Basotho be referred to it prior to enactment.

The period of the Second World War and the years immediately following it witnessed the growth of political awareness in the country. During the war numerous Basotho had served in the ancillary military services, and had travelled widely in Africa and Europe, coming in contact with (for them) new countries and new ideas. Wherever they served they won the admiration of those who came in contact with them, for their teamwork, and for their coolness and presence of mind in the face of danger.

The electoral principle had already been introduced, at district council level, in 1943, since which date the councils had had elected majorities. The electoral idea quickly took root, and from it political life began to develop along modern lines.

In 1955 the Basutoland Council, still solely advisory and composed mainly of chiefs, asked to be given legislative powers. As a result, a new constitution came into force in March 1960. A legislative council, known as the Basutoland National Council, was formed, composed of 40 members elected by members of the district councils (themselves elected), 22 principal chiefs together with 14 members nominated by the Paramount Chief on the advice of the Resident Commissioner and four official members. With this came an executive council with four official and four non-official members.

But the pressure for political advance continued. Just over a year after the new constitution came into effect, the National Council in September 1961 passed a resolution in consequence of which the Paramount Chief was invited to appoint a constitutional commission, which drafted the framework of a pre-independence constitution. This was discussed at a conference in London in April 1964, and with certain amendments was accepted by the British Government, together with the undertaking that 'if, at any time not earlier than one year after the new elections, the people of Basutoland, by resolutions of both Houses of the Basutoland Parliament (or, in the event of disagreement between them, by a majority of those voting at a referendum) should ask for independence, the British Government would seek to give effect to their wishes as soon as possible'.

By this time three political parties were in existence. Of these

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the first to be founded was the Basutoland Congress Party, created and led by Mr. Ntsu Mokhehle, who gave up a promising teaching career in order to devote himself to politics, with the aim of achieving independence. In keeping with the times in Africa, this party became associated with pan-Africanism, and was receiving financial support from Peking, funnelled into Africa through Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Opposed to this body was the Basutoland National Party, a more conservative organization in which chiefs formed a significant group in the membership, and the Marematlou Freedom Party, led by Dr. S. K. Mokotoko, and described as middle-of-the-road, though this appellation hardly seemed to harmonize with certain indications of financial support from Moscow. In other words, as events moved towards the elections of April 1965, it looked as though Basutoland was destined to become a battleground for the conflicting communist ideas of the Soviet Union and China. The National Party, with its more moderate views and its determination to have good relations with South Africa, seemed a somewhat pallid middle force, unlikely to achieve much.

The high temperature of pre-election campaigning set by the Congress and Marematlou parties, however, caused the doubts



of the more wary to increase and find voice. An ugly incident in the latter part of 1964, when four Congress Party members were murdered by allegedly Marematlou adherents, caused a marked swing of opinion away from extremism, and severely damaged the Marematlou Freedom Party's chances, which had earlier seemed favourable. As these changes took place, the National Party, under its leader, the experienced and jovial Chief Leabua Jonathan, increased its hold on the country. Almost inevitably, the election issues narrowed to the question of friendship with, or opposition to, the Republic of South Africa, the Congress Party pursuing its pan-Africanist line, the National Party laying down the hard facts of life: that Basutoland is dependent on South Africa for supplies and for employment of men. Narrowly, but clearly enough to be taken as a mandate of the people, the common sense view won the day. In the voting at the general election, which took place on 29th April 1965, the National Party won 31 seats, the Congress Party 25, and the Marematlou Freedom Party four, giving the National Party an overall majority of two.

The pre-independence constitution which came into effect with the election provides that the executive authority, which is vested in the Queen, shall be exercised on her behalf by the Paramount Chief, acting on the advice of his Prime Minister. Parliament consists of two Houses: a Senate consisting of 22 principal chiefs or their nominees, and 11 other persons nominated by the Paramount Chief; and a National Assembly consisting of 60 members elected by universal adult suffrage. Responsibility for external affairs, defence, and internal security is retained by a British Government Representative resident at Maseru. The Representative has certain powers of financial control, and is responsible for the public service until such time as a Public Service Commission is made executive. The Paramount Chief has a Privy Council to advise him, consisting of the Prime Minister, the British Government Representative, and one other person whom the Paramount Chief has the right to appoint.

* * *

As can be seen, the seed of political organization was planted early and has thrived; the seed of rural economic development was planted later, and may still be called to some extent immature. Though the first serious attempts to combat soil erosion

by terracing, tree planting, and the construction of dams and village irrigation works, were started in 1935, it was not till after 1948 that this and other developments vital to the country's survival got under way. Between 1948 and the present time an immense amount has been done by government, assisted by Colonial Development and Welfare and other grants and loans, to control the relentless conflict between a rising population and the process of agricultural decline. Much has been achieved, but the time has not been long enough for it to be truly said that decline has been arrested, although the rate of decline has undoubtedly been slowed down.

Here the difficulty is a human one: that it is still only the few who understand that soil conservation, modern stock-breeding methods, and the need for more men to work the land, are not just (as they are often described) 'white men's stories'. Whoever rules Basutoland will face these same needs. This is perhaps internally the major problem for the country's leaders of the future. The two seeds – of political organization and economic development – thrive best when they have been planted together at the same time, when awareness of the responsibilities of the one is conjoined with awareness of the needs of the other. Among the country's leading politicians there are probably few who are not aware of Basutoland's economic needs, but they are leading a country still largely unaware.

17. WATER

EXTERNALLY, the most important – the perennial – problem will rest with all that concerns relations with South Africa. Basutoland's economy is inseparably bound up with South Africa. Without South African goodwill, particularly in the matter of wool and mohair exports, and in the employment of Basotho in the mines, the little country would be a hopeless proposition. There are already signs that 'non-aligned' Africa appreciates Basutoland's need to be on good terms with the great and powerful neighbour encircling her.

When the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910, a built-in statutory clause made provision for the ultimate incorporation of the so-called High Commission territories (Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland) into the Union, if such a development should be agreed by a clear majority of all concerned. On several occasions since then, South Africa has raised the subject with Britain. General Hertzog brought it up with Mr. J. H. Thomas in 1935; Dr. Malan mentioned it pointedly at an official dinner given to Mr. Patrick Gordon Walker in 1951; and it again came up at the 1956 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Conference. Since the Nationalist Party victory of 1948, however, the British Government has held firmly to the view that there could be no question of a merger unless the peoples of the territories expressed a wish for it.

In 1963 Dr. Verwoerd, in contradistinction to the previous trend of political thinking, stated that South Africa had no ambitions over the territories, though he intimated that their future might be better assured were South Africa, and not Britain, their guardian. It would seem, therefore, that at the moment Basutoland has little to fear from a possible South African take-over. Nonetheless, Basutoland, economically and geographically, remains a grace-and-favour country, a situation demanding on the part of her leaders the tact and forbearance which such a description implies.

Moreover, the way in which Basutoland's politics develop is

more than a simple question of neighbourly relations. It concerns in addition one of the most important issues liable to affect the country's internal development. For it is political considerations, as much as economic ones, which overhang the development and use of Basutoland's greatest and most momentous natural resource – water.

As we observed in examining local geography, the sources of the Orange River, which rises in Basutoland, are the natural reservoir for near-waterless South Africa. It is a source of water which has never been developed, but the time is foreseeably near when South Africa's continued industrial expansion will render it imperative to have access to it – *when* is the economic side of the question, *how* is the political one.

The most valuable farming areas of the Orange Free State, and the great industrial complex of Johannesburg and the Reef, are alike dependent for water on the small Vaal River, which, after forming the Free State's northern and western border, ultimately flows into the Orange in Griqualand West. Within the area watered by the Vaal live 5 million people, who between them produce one-half of South Africa's spending power, and manufacture just under half South Africa's goods. The area contains the largest gold mining industry in the world, one of the world's largest coalfields, the world's third largest diamond industry, the largest steel works in Africa, the largest irrigation scheme in southern Africa, and South Africa's largest fuel oil and power-generating plants. It is the greatest industrial and commercial area on the continent, and one of the greatest in the world; and it is expanding rapidly and with increasing momentum.

In 1936 the first big attempt at gathering and fully utilizing the slender resources of the Vaal River – the Vaaldam – was completed. The main intention of the scheme was to benefit farmers, though Johannesburg and the Reef paid 90 per cent of the cost, and certainly did receive more water in consequence. In 1963 another scheme was completed further down the river – the Vaalharts irrigation scheme, which brings water to 1,388 farmers cultivating 43,000 morgen* under peanuts, lucerne, wheat and cotton. The peanut crop alone earns South Africa £4 million a year.

*1 morgen equals 2.11 acres.

The potential of the Vaalharts scheme, however, is 50,000 morgen under irrigation, and this has never been achieved because the Vaal simply cannot supply enough water. Meanwhile, at the other end of the line Johannesburg, which has footed most of the bill, is still short of water, the demands of the Vaalharts farmers resulting in frequent water cuts on the Rand.

Recently a third and equally ambitious scheme has been started, this time to dam the Orange River near its confluence with the Caledon, well below Basutoland. The Orange River scheme – though when one sees the cost figures it sounds depressing to say so – is in the long run another palliative. It will produce more water for the farmers, and will ease the load on Vaal water for Johannesburg; it could also, by pumping and at prohibitive cost to water-users on the Reef, bolster industrial supplies for a few years to come; but it can *never* supply sufficient water to keep pace with the Reef's development, which is prodigious, and will ultimately – unless devious and costly alternatives, such as using atomic power to convert sea-water into fresh, are resorted to – demand the not unprodigious step of utilizing southern Africa's natural reservoir, which still lies untapped beneath the winter snow on the heights of Basutoland.

The Vaal River's assured maximum supply is 650 million gallons per day below the Vaaldam, which is where all the main users are. In 1900 Johannesburg was using 1 million gallons a day; by 1920 this figure had risen to 20 million gallons, by 1932 to 60 million, and in 1963 to 230 million. In this year the Vaalharts scheme was completed, since when the water of the small Vaal River is being used over an area of 4,000 square miles. The farms are using 420 million gallons a day, and this is still inadequate. By 1968, however, the needs of Johannesburg and the Reef will have risen from 230 million gallons to 250 million; by 1980 the estimated need is 500 million gallons; and by 1990 the Reef will need 650 million gallons a day, *all the water in the Vaal*. To add to the gravity of the problem, a second industrial complex originating in Durban is spreading gradually north-westward, and will in due course meet and merge with that of the Reef.

As Mr. James Clarke, writing in the Johannesburg *Star*, aptly put it (31st October 1963): 'A third of South Africa's population is directly affected by the water that flows down the little river,

and indirectly the entire nation is dependent upon it. The time will come when men will see water not as something from an inexhaustible tap, but as the most vital of all our raw materials. . . . The time will come when men will realize that gold and diamonds, coal and uranium are as nothing compared with water.'

* * *

The sources of the Orange lie in the northern part of the Maluti massif, here dominated by the Drakensberg peak of Mont aux Sources, 10,763 feet. From these sources flow approximately 1,600 million gallons of water per day. As the Cape Town consulting engineer Mr. Ninham Shand, who investigated the matter for the Basutoland Government, stated in his report (June 1962): 'The water is of a very high standard of chemical purity and of very low turbidity. Owing to the sparse animal and human population it also has little or no bacteriological contamination. These are all ideal attributes for domestic and industrial supplies.' The area is so high that water could be supplied to any part of the Reef by gravity, 'and still leave head to develop substantial blocks of hydro-electric power as a by-product'. Actually the conditions are so perfect that Basutoland could without the least difficulty supply water to Rhodesia.

The first stage of the suggested scheme for supplying South Africa would consist of constructing a dam on the Maubamatso River, one of the sources of the Orange, at a site known as Oxbow, from which a tunnel bored through the Drakensberg would by gravitational flow bring water to the existing Vaal catchment system, thus increasing the little river's flow of water by 75 million gallons a day, by a single stroke satisfying the present requirements both of the Free State farmers and the Reef. This first stage, to include construction of a hydro-electric power station at Witzieshoek connecting with the main electricity supply at Harrismith, would cost something in the region of £10 million. The construction of two further dams in the Maluti heights would give South Africa a supply of water sufficient to meet the requirements of the Reef at its *present rate of growth* for more than a *hundred years*. The scheme could also, as a very minor by-product, provide Basutoland with the hydro-electric power she needs if she is to develop manufacturing industries.

Both sides are aware of the scheme's potentialities, and there

have been tentative discussions on it at government level. The South African Government, however, in its public pronouncements on water, consistently makes no overt reference to the possibility of utilizing Basutoland's water resources, indicating that the matter is viewed with reservations. In view of the scheme's overwhelming economic advantages, these reservations can only be political.

The scheme has been coupled with the suggestion that South Africa should pay for the water at a modest rate, but one which would nonetheless be of great financial aid to Basutoland, dependent as she is for outside assistance to maintain her integrity as a separate state. For a few years more – possibly till around 1975 – South Africa will be able to make do with such water as can be harnessed within her territory. But the day will surely come when she must have access to the waters of the Maluti. In the question of *how* she obtains the water much will depend at that future date on the nature of the relations between South Africa and Basutoland, and it cannot be overlooked that while water is Basutoland's greatest asset, it could also in certain circumstances prove to be a threat to her political existence. As in the days of Moshesh, so in the future, the survival of the Basotho as an independent people is synonymous with wise diplomacy.

* * *

Despite the extreme difficulties imposed by her terrain, Basutoland moves towards independence better equipped than were quite a number of the African states which have preceded her along the same political road. The country has a higher percentage of graduates in the public service than any other African colony at a similar moment in its political development. Africanization of the public service has been proceeding steadily since the war; many departments are almost entirely African, with African heads of department, including – a notable achievement – the Department of Medical and Health Services. Even in the departments which are still headed by Europeans (agriculture, police, prisons, co-operative development, etc.), the number of Europeans on the staff is surprisingly low. The principal of the vitally important Agricultural Training School is an African, as is the principal of the Basutoland High School. The Churches are very highly africanized, and this continuing process of

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africanization is nourished by an exceptionally widespread and broad-based education system, for years a significant feature of Basotho life.

At the U.B.B.S. (the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland) the professorial staff presents a truly remarkable collection of races and nationalities, with talent as the sole criterion of selection. The university is of course still in its very early days, but if it develops as it is intended to, it may well end by creating in Basutoland an important centre of African learning, available to many countries, justifying the confidence of its sponsors, who include the British Government, the American Agency for International Development, and the Ford Foundation. The university, in fact, with its sturdy and often elegant buildings, gradually emerging from scaffolding amid the hills and plains of a wild, rugged, untamed country, in many ways typifies Basutoland as it is today – building for a future which is as enigmatic as is the sight of these foundations of learning being set down amid the loneliness of so strange a land.

And yet, one asks, is the future of Basutoland any more an enigma today than it was in 1836, in 1868, in 1910, or at any other former date one cares to name? The answer is – probably – that it is not. But for those who are working to build that future, there is little time for speculation. Stone is being laid upon stone, roofs are going up, students are enrolling – that is enough. As with so much else in Africa, it is today that matters. When one can even begin to glimpse the solution to today's problems, it may be time to consider tomorrow. Not before.

18. TOURISM

WHILE the provision of water to South Africa is one of the country's great untapped resources for the future, another resource already developed to some extent, but capable of considerable extension in the future, is tourism.

With its magnificent scenery, healthy climate and excellent inns (nearly every town has one), Basutoland is a singularly pleasant country to visit for a holiday, particularly for those in search of complete relaxation, or who enjoy trekking into the wilds.

One or two of the leading hotels are widely known outside the country. The Lancers' Inn in the heart of Maseru offers the modern comforts of good hostelry in a setting inseparable from history. Founded as a trader's store in 1869, the first year of Maseru's existence, it was used as a European fort in the Gun War of 1880-81, and was for many years the home of Sir Godfrey Lagden, the most beloved and learned of Basutoland's Resident Commissioners. In 1904 part of it became a boarding house, and the whole, developed and added to over the years, has grown into one of the best country hotels in southern Africa.

Many of the inns in the country towns, apart from the excellence of their fare, are magnificently situated, the palm in this respect perhaps going to the Blue Mountain Inn at Teyateyaneng, which boasts a superb view and one of the most beautifully designed and kept gardens in Basutoland, its willows and other trees attracting every singing bird from miles around.

Near Mohale's Hoek there are authentic cannibal caves which eerily reward a visit, and at Masitise, just off the road between Mohale's Hoek and Quthing, is the cave house inhabited by the distinguished French Protestant missionary Frédéric Ellenberger and his family from 1860 for about 20 years, and today preserved as a museum.

At the small but interesting museum at Morija, the original seat of Christianity in Basutoland, about 27 miles from Maseru on the road to Mafeteng, visitors can have a painless introduction to dinosaurs' footprints, said to be over 80 million years old, and

to the flora of equally ancient times, which by the same freak process of nature have left their imprint on rocks in various parts of the country. Some of the more outstanding examples have been reproduced, and are kept at the museum. The originals can be seen *in situ* by the determined, but the places are hard to find, and a knowledgeable guide is needed.

No visit to Basutoland is complete without a drive up the Mountain Road – unsurfaced but very well constructed and maintained – which from Maseru runs 83 miles into the Maluti mountain massif, amid scenery of gaunt magnificence, a world apart. It is the eventual intention that this road should traverse the entire country, reaching Mokhotlong and the Sani Pass, from which down the slopes of the Drakensberg there is a dizzily spectacular descent into Natal, at present usable only by jeeps.

For those who wish to go even further afield, Basutair, a private airline using four-seater Cessna aircraft piloted by experienced Europeans, has regular services over the agreeably terrifying mountains, in winter a world of snow, to many places beyond the reach of roads. Basutair makes an important contribution to the life of Basutoland, carrying doctors on regular outstation visits, transporting medical supplies and food, and bringing the sick to hospitals.

The rivers of the Maluti provide some of the best trout-fishing in Africa. For those in search of a truly open-air holiday, trekking into the mountains on horseback, staying in well-equipped *rondaavels* situated near the best fishing areas and within reach of such beauty-spots as the Maletsunyané Falls, there is an efficient travel service in Maseru, run by a British family long connected with the country, and in touch with leading South African travel agencies.

In other words, where tourism is concerned, there is something to work on – nor would Basutoland be by any means the first country for whom tourism tips the budget scales.

* * *

But the provision of water and the encouragement of tourism can, of course, never be more than makeshift solutions to the real problems Basutoland poses, problems which lie embedded in the powdery soil of the land, and immured in the traditions and ways of thought of those who dwell in it.

When I left Basutoland it was the end of August, and the

TOURISM

willows, first harbingers of spring, were bursting into pale leaf along the beds of small rivers, where amid the dearth of winter one had scarcely noticed their existence. In the stark, brooding land of rock and eroded earth, each tree, vivid with the personality of a favourite child, seemed to laugh at beholding the wonder of its own existence. Never before, I think, have I seen spring come with quite the same message of hope.

It reminded me of that first visit to Thaba Bosiu, and of the words of my Mosotho companion, wistfully thinking of summer – of the future – when the land would be green.

But the summer had not yet come. The astounding immensities of mauve distance were still arid and silent, their stillness broken only by the moving pinpoints of starving cattle and horses.

We were driving to the frontier post, passing the same avenue of trees – eucalyptus, were they? in memory it is thus that they seem – those sentinels of civilization, of which the primeval meaning is the productive earth.



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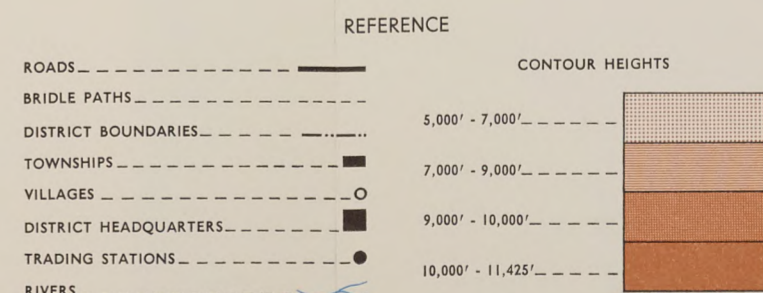
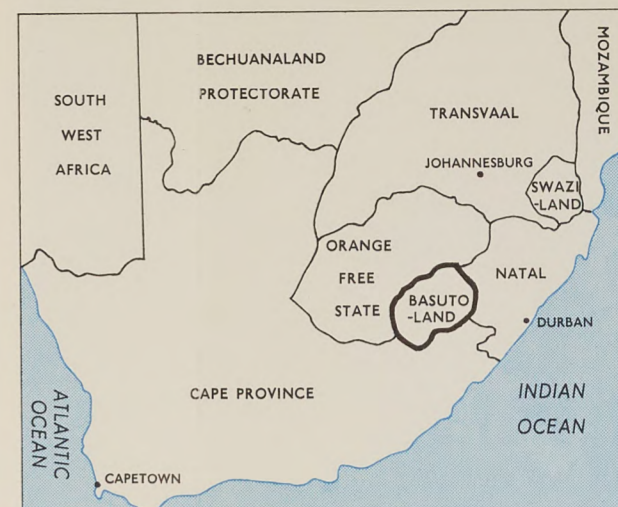
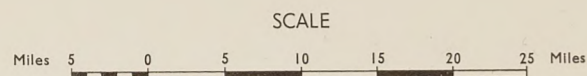
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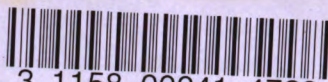
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